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ERRORS

REGARDING RELIGION:

AND

THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

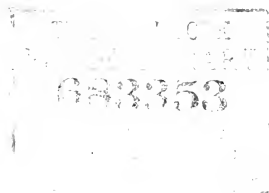
AT

THE PRESENT TIME.

BY JAMES DOUGLAS, Esq.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE attempt to enumerate and class errors might at first view appear to be merely a waste of time. Truth is one and the same, but error appears infinite and ever varying ; from its very nature it would seem to have no limits and no end. But the limits which it has not in itself, it receives from the nature of belief, and from the nature of the mind. Error, in order to be believed, must include a considerable proportion of truth. And errors, in order to be received, must either have a similitude to the reality of things, or an adaptation to the disposition or state of the mind which embraces them.

Thus, in philosophy, as well as in religion, there are only a certain number of outlets by which the mind forsakes the straight way of truth. Hence the same systems are ever recurring in the most distant ages and countries. The cosmogonies of the Ionic schools of Philosophy in Greece are at this day flourishing among the Chinese, and the transcendental Pantheism of the Eleatic school has its counterparts in the writings of the Buddhists and the Burmans. And the mind in its narrow revolution of changes, is ever presenting again the same darkened phases of error.

The origin of all departures from the true religion consists in the want of spirituality in the fallen mind of man. "God is a spirit and those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth ;" but in the darkened understanding of man, the glory of the divine character is soon obscured. He that lives to God, and would retain the divine knowledge, must walk by faith, and not by sight. Men, unless renewed in the spirit of their minds, walk by sight and not by faith. If a revelation of the will of God is granted to them, they either forsake it en-

tirely, or cover and conceal its true import with vain traditions and lying fables.

The first departure from true religion, after the deluge, consisted in imperceptibly substituting a visible object of worship for the true and invisible God. The visible heavens, and the spirit that was supposed to animate them, received the homage of the early tribes of mankind, (by a gradual departure which they themselves scarcely perceived,) instead of that pure and holy Being, whom "heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain, whom the eye of man cannot behold, and who must be discerned and approached by faith alone. This worship of the heavens, and their animating power, is traced in the texture of primitive language, and in the remains of the most ancient worship.

The transition from the worship of the heavens to the worship of the heavenly bodies is easy and obvious.

The belief in the immortality of the soul naturally led to the belief that the dead, though divested of their grosser body, have not laid aside their cares and solitudes for the living, but that they are still present with their posterity, and are become the protectors of their families and of their nations.

As the heavenly bodies were worshipped either when visible in the heavens, or if in the gloom of temples, by their emblem, the sacred fire; so deceased heroes were worshipped by rudely carved images or teraphim, and hence the origin of idolatry.

As long as the world was considered merely in parts, these parts alone were deified; but when philosophy arose, the world began to be considered as a whole; the scattered parts and their animating principles were reunited, and the separate deities of Polytheism were either absorbed into the soul of the world, or considered as emanations from the fountain of mind.

But philosophy took a second step, and from reducing all the portions of the world to two eternal substances, matter and mind, reduced these two into one, Mind which alone has real existence, and which becomes matter, by defect merely, as it flows dark and languid around

its circumference, though glowing and energetic and spiritual at its centre or heart ; and hence the Emanative system.

Philosophy took a third step, and considered that that which in itself is infinite, and one, can never in reality be many and finite ; and that if we do not perceive in all things the one and absolute being, this must be attributed to a peculiar illusion, the *Maia* of the Hindoos ; and hence the strict Pantheistic system.

In the above classes are included all the systems that have ever prevailed among nations destitute of revelation.

When Christianity was proclaimed, there were two ways of receiving it,—either for men to forsake their superstitions, and their systems of philosophy, falsely so called, and to receive in sincerity “the truth as it is in Jesus ;” or to endeavour to form an alliance between Christianity and their former opinions. The latter attempt gave rise to the early heresies. The Jewish heresies consisted chiefly in endeavouring to preserve the authority of Moses and their ancient law, by reducing the Messiah and the Christian revelation to the same level. The early Gentile or Gnostic heresies consisted in attempting to incorporate Christianity with that modification of the Emanative system then prevalent in the west of Asia. The Gnostic philosophy consisted in the belief of the stream of existence flowing from its divine fountain through a number of personifications, such as life, light, and wisdom, which they named *Æons*, till it reached its dark and impure termination in becoming matter ; or in beings possessed of those malignant qualities which union with matter was supposed to occasion. And the whole of their practical religion and philosophy consisted in endeavouring to escape from matter, and in purifying the heavenly spark within them, that it might return to the original source of light.

After the Gnostics had perished, less by the opposition of Christians than by the powerful arms of Porphyry, who attacked both Christianity and Gnosticism at once, the heresies among Christians arose chiefly from the wish to explain and ascertain the doctrine of the

Trinity, and the equality or inferiority of the three Persons, by the help of the philosophy most prevalent in those days. And, accordingly, their reasonings concerning the Trinity, and the various disputes that occurred in consequence, proceed chiefly upon some modification of the Emanative system.

But, while Gentile philosophy was thus distracting the learned, Gentile superstition was making rapid inroads upon the vulgar. In addition to the high mysteries of Christian Pantheism, there were also introduced the mummeries of a Christian Polytheism. Popery, which is merely baptized Paganism, began to rear its head, and to replace the ancient idols under new names.

In the Mysticism of the dark ages, we have a milder Pantheism united to the doctrines of Christianity, and, in the midst of many mistakes, often breathing sentiments of true and fervent piety.

The Reformation was a gradual work; the whole body of error was not cast off at once, but one error was rejected after another. Of course, the sooner the reformation in any country came to a stand, the more numerous were the errors that were retained. The reformers are, however, superior to their disciples; they were more freed from the trammels of human authority, and appealed more directly to the very words of Scripture. Scholastic theology and artificial systems began to revive amongst the reformed, perhaps a good deal from the example and influence of Melancton, the first systematic writer among the reformed, whose genius was of a tamer cast, though his scholarship was great, and who, too submissive to former authority, wanted the fervid and commanding mind of Luther, or the philosophic understanding of Calvin.

The freedom of the reformation gave rise to the latitudinarian theology, and the self-entitled rational divines, falsely so called,—men who misinterpreted the maxim, that the Scriptures could contain nothing contrary to reason, and supposed that the Scriptures were to retain nothing which was contrary to their ignorance and prejudice. That a truth should be agreeable to reason, is

one thing, and that it should be agreeable to the reasoning of every shallow thinker, is another. True theology is conformable to reason enlarged and enlightened by revelation; but rational theology, as it is called, conforms itself to the reasonings and the mistakes of each individual, and changes its shape continually, like a cloud blown by the wind. Rational theology at its birth is Arminianism; in its growth it passes through the different shades of Arianism; and its short-lived maturity is Socinianism. While Socinianism itself is handing over its pupils, with more rapidity than it receives them, to the inner school of infidelity; and infidelity, without any stable tenets of its own, is accelerating the progress of the initiated, through its slight variety of changes, towards total scepticism or Atheism; and the want of all principles or belief is predisposing the mind to the reception of any tenets that may present themselves, however absurd, in order to fill up the rayless and hopeless vacancy of unbelief.

With respect to the errors in religious belief which are peculiar to the present time, we may remark, that they are very insignificant, when compared with those of ancient times. They are the offspring of men who possess no great vigour of mind or originality of thought. They proceed from narrow views of the truth, and are more reprehensible for exaggeration than for falsehood. The old errors are in a sickly and declining condition; they are chiefly believed because they have been frequently repeated, and because it is convenient to hold them. There is much that is promising in the present appearance of things, whenever the truth shall be brought to bear with a divine energy upon the world at large. The fastnesses of falsehood, as well as the strong holds of tyranny, are mouldering away; and many circumstances and events appear to be forwarding that great change, when the knowledge of God and of the Saviour shall overspread the world as widely as the light of day.

PART FIRST.

RISE OF POLYTHEISM AND PANTHEISM.

- I. Fragments of the true Religion among the Heathen.
- II. Worship of the Visible Heavens and of the Elements.
- III. Worship of Deceased Ancestors.
- IV. Complex and Mythological Worship.
- V. External Polytheism and Internal Mysteries.
- VI. Outer and Inner Philosophy.
- VII. Emanation and Pantheism.
- VIII. The World by Wisdom knew not God.
- IX. The true Notion of Creation peculiar to the Hebrew Scriptures.

ERRORS REGARDING RELIGION

PART I.

I. TRACES of primeval revelation, and of the worship of the true God, are found dispersed in scattered fragments over the habitable earth. Even tribes so rude as to be enumerated among the instances of men who had no religion, are yet discovered, from subsequent information, to retain vestiges, however faint, of the primitive condition of man. These fragments of ancient knowledge are striking in themselves, but would appear much more wonderful if they were carefully collected and reunited by some skilful hand.

Works upon this subject are sufficiently numerous, but in general they receive every thing without discrimination, and the gross credulity with which they are written, has thrown considerable discredit upon the whole subject.

Recollections of the principal events of antediluvian history may be clearly and easily traced, and the deluge itself, as might be expected, holds a very prominent place in universal tradition. The creation of the world; paradise, or the golden age; the fall of man, or the loss of his first happy state; the

wickedness of the antediluvians, and their almost universal destruction by a deluge, are rumours of past events which have reached the new as well as the old world ; and which, in the language of the old poet, are ever sounding over earth and sea. These traditions gradually assume a greater consistency, and more nearly resemble the truth in proportion as we approach the ancient abodes of mankind in the east. The Syrians, as we see by Lucian, preserved a very accurate account of the deluge, and commemorated the escape of the remnant of the race who were preserved by him whom the Greeks call Deucalion, in his ark, along with the inferior animals who entered by pairs. Nor less accurate is the account which Ovid gives of the creation of the world in wonderful accordance with the Scriptures ; an account which appears to be derived from the early tribes which peopled Greece and Italy, united to notices received from the Phenicians. Each quarter of the world had its mythological gardens, and the golden age appears partly as the state from which man had fallen, at other times, as the happy condition to which he was to be restored. There are also many traditions current respecting the Deity, and the divine government of the world, of which Plato has preserved several samples, that may be traced to early revelation, though they are more disfigured, as may be supposed, than recollections that relate to the events of history. Even in positive rites, as in the respect attached to the seventh

day, and most of all, in the observance and manner of sacrifice, there are marked and striking connexions between the various tribes of mankind. It is observable, that after the deluge, when the human race were separated and dispersed, their traditions also separate, and each nation commences a series of fables of its own.

II. But though mankind separated, they all carried along with them the same evil heart of unbelief, an equal proneness to sense, and tendency to forget the true and living God. They had within them the same faculties, and without them the same nature. The course of error had thus a wonderful similarity in its rise and progress, as much so as if the first nations had proceeded with common consent, and a premeditated design, to the adoption of those superstitions which spread one universal cloud over the Gentile world.

In worshipping God, men, from a variety of reasons, naturally turn to the heavens, and, under the name of heavens, they as naturally blend together three distinct abodes,—the expanse of the air,—the space in which the stars revolve,—and the residence of the blessed spirits and holy intelligences, where God peculiarly manifests his presence. From this last import of the term, God and the heavens are united in speech, and, in some degree, in imagination. Even the Scriptures make use of the word heavens in this point of view, where it is said to Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom should be re

stored unto him "after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule." Thus the blending of the visible heavens with obscure notions of the Deity, gave rise to the first corruption of religion. Such is the worship, still prevalent in China, of Tien, or the heavens, where there is no clear distinction between the visible object and the divine principle which is supposed to dwell in it, and to animate it. Such is the Jupiter of the ancient Etruscans. "*Aspice hoc sublime candens quem invocant omnes Jovem,*"* and such the Deity of the still earlier Pelasgians, whom they invoked as the dweller in Æther, and the driver of the clouds.

The transition was very ancient from worshipping the heavens in general to the worship of the sun as the eye of nature, the source of light and heat, the moon, the softened image of his brightness, and his kindred lights the stars. As the Pelasgians, the most ancient tribe of the Greeks, worshipped the Æther, or the shining firmament above them, so the Dorians, perhaps the next in antiquity, were peculiarly devoted to the religious service of Apollo and Diana, the sun and moon, and as the one is communicant, and the other recipient of brightness and power, the distinction of the active and passive nature was introduced, and they became male and female deities.

The sun, or universal fire, like the Egyptian Osiris, became the representative of active power ;

* Behold this lofty and bright expanse, invoked by all as Jupiter.

the moon, the lower air, or the earth, like Isis, denoted the passive nature.

In addition to the heavenly bodies, the whole of existence was first personified, and then worshipped. "Wherever there was motion there was soul," according to the maxim of Thales. The earth, as the giver and support of existence, was early adored as the universal parent, feeding her unnumbered offspring at unnumbered breasts. While the Phenicians, or whoever first ventured upon the waters, finding new agents disposing of the lives and fortunes of men, offered up their vows to the propitious or adverse winds, and their homage to the dark and restless power of the sea.

Thus the mighty blank of inanimate nature was filled throughout with passion and intelligence, and the mind of man, in the mirror of the universe, beheld its own image reflected back wherever it turned its view, but multiplied, and magnified, and beautified.

III. A second source of false religion, and the origin of idle worship, consisted in the veneration paid to the souls of deceased ancestors. This superstition is generally, by the best authorities, considered as more recent than the adoration of the heavens. It is, however, of very ancient origin; and at first, it is probable, it was scarcely to be considered as idolatry, but began in some superstitious respect to rude images made in remembrance of the dead. Such appeared to be the state of Laban's family;

who acknowledged the true God, though a superstitious and culpable homage towards the domestic images of their ancestors was evidently springing up among them. Such, no doubt, was the origin of the teraphim among the Jews as well as of the household gods among the Gentile nations. Though generally small as well as rude in their carving, one of these teraphim, which was placed by Michal in the room of David, must have been about the size as well as the shape of a human figure.

Everywhere the souls of ancestors, like the demons of the Greeks, or disembodied intelligences of ancient heroes, were thought to watch over the welfare of their descendants ; invisible, as Hesiod observes, in air or mist, but bringing speedy help to the virtuous, and punishment to the wicked.

The progress from being the guardian of a family to becoming the protecting deity of a nation was easy ; when an individual was advanced to the sovereign power his household idols shared in his plunder and prosperity. Again, when a conqueror died, his troops still felt themselves led on by his spirit to victory ; he naturally became their guardian deity, and new battles fought successfully after vows had been offered up to him, enlarged the supposed sphere of his power, and added new attributes to his divinity. The deified heroes made continual encroachments on the first religion, till both became blended together, or till, as happened in Egypt, some early Phaeton

usurped the chariot of the sun, and drove, with a mortal arm, the coursers of the day.

IV. A striking instance of complex superstition, from the blending hero-worship with the adoration of the heavenly bodies, is found in the Grecian Hercules, who, among the Egyptians and the Phenicians, was the midsummer sun, in the fulness of his strength, personified along with the twelve signs of the zodiac, or the monthly labours of his annual revolution. The Hercules of the Greeks appears, from Homer, to have been a piratical adventurer, one of the early sea-kings of the Grecian seas, whose descendants and numerous followers became, after some generations, the conquerors and kings of a number of little states. Hence the fame of their ancestor grew great with the successes of his posterity; and the contrast is very striking, in the *Odyssey*, between the ancient and genuine text, which represents him as a noble and heroic shade in Elysium, and the spurious and additional verses which pay their court to the Heraclidæ, by describing him as a demi-god in the heavens. The flattery of after-times has so inextricably confounded the human hero with the celestial patron whose name he bore, that it is impossible exactly to say where the true labours of Hercules end, and where the mythological labours of the heavenly Hercules begin.

But Polytheism was not only diversified by the union of two separate sources of superstition; it was still farther enriched by a diversity of personi-

fications, and the introduction of a complexity of emblems. Thus the sun became a variety of deities, according to the different aspects in which he was viewed. The vernal sun became the infant Horus, as Hercules was the sun in his strength ; at the approach of winter, the distant and feebler luminary was worshipped as the dying Adonis, or at the winter solstice lamented as the dead Osiris. And, to bestow a still greater diversity upon the emblems which denoted their principal deity, the priests of the Nile gave the figure of every sign into which he entered to the sun ; so that every new month afforded a new deity. Thus, upon entering Aries, the sun was worshipped as a ram, and was distinguished as Ammon. On entering the constellation Taurus, he was worshipped as a bull, and became the celebrated Apis.

The variety of deities now produced were placed under one head, and subjected to one celestial king. Power tends to unity, in thought, as well as in fact ; and one of the deified objects in nature was naturally considered as supreme. This supremacy, the generality of nations placed in the splendour and beneficence of the sun ; while some tribes on the coast, more dependent upon the ocean, considered that as the divinest of beings which subjects to the eye, even of sense, the image of the multiform Infinite—immensity in space, in number, in duration, and in degree—the unbounded expanse of innumerable waves, and everlasting motion impressed by immeasurable power.

The image of power is, in some measure, productive of fear, and fear would work upon imagination. The energies which were at first dim abstractions diffused through the elements, were brought by imagination nearer to man, were invested with the human form, and actuated by human passions. The poets completed what the minds of the community had begun, and nothing remained to the deities of the elements in which they arose, except the emblems of them. The power of heaven still retained his thunderbolt, and the power of the sea his earth-shaking trident.

V. The complicated superstitions of the Gentiles were, in many nations, rendered more intricate and perplexing by the institution of a numerous hereditary priesthood. This is one cause of the difference between the mythology of Greece and of several nations of the east. Where mythology was nursed by poetry, it became plastic and imaginative also; where it was modelled by the priesthood, it was dark, cumbrous, and over-wrought with emblems. The system of hieroglyphics added both to the number and to the fantastic and monstrous shapes of the Egyptian idols.

To the priesthood may also be traced the existence of an inner and of an outer religion; gross superstitions presented to the vulgar, and more refined mysteries reserved for the initiated. Amongst simple tribes, where there is no regular priesthood, there is nothing complex in the rites of worship.

and little consistency in the scheme of belief; their temples and images are rude and unfrequent; they worship nature when visible and present to their senses, and make scarcely any use of representative symbols. These are introduced with temples, and are necessary in a service no longer carried on in the face of nature. These emblems, when once introduced, are continually increasing in numbers and complexity, and are mistaken by the people for new deities; while the hereditary priesthood preserve among themselves the reasons for which these varied representations were contrived. The priesthood seem always to have been aware of the origin of hero-worship, and of the political motives on account of which their deceased kings and legislators were admitted among the number of the gods.

It was through the priests of Egypt that the Grecian travellers learned that the adoration of the heavenly bodies was the original worship of that country as well as of the other nations of antiquity; and several reformers of Polytheism seemed desirous to have brought back the superstitions of their country to the primitive model. On this plan most of their idols would have been discarded, the homage paid to dead men would have been restricted, and the sun, moon, and stars would have been considered as supreme, and alone truly divine. This is probably the utmost that the largest and most enlightened minds among the Gentiles, and who most lamented the immorality of their mythology, and the corrup-

tion of their principles, would have done for the mass of their countrymen ; though those who were initiated in the mysteries were instructed, (in an erroneous and confused sense,) in the unity of the divine Being. The mysteries appear to have consisted in communicating to a certain portion of the population those views which the priesthood, and the legislators who had been initiated by the priesthood, entertained upon the religion and the superstition of their country.

Unfettered by the rights and fables which they were inculcating upon others, and abounding in leisure and tranquillity, the sacred caste of Egypt, Chaldea, and India, appear to have laid the first foundations of speculative philosophy. They had enlarged the worship of the sun into the adoration of the universal fire, or active principle which pervades existence. They considered nature not in detached parts, guided by a variety of different minds, but as one immense whole actuated by one common soul, of which other minds were but portions and emanations. Thus, in the Orphic hymns which, if not so ancient as once supposed, yet retrace very ancient opinions, a complete identity is asserted between the most dissimilar deities ; to the eyes of the initiated all the gods are blended into one, and Jupiter, Juno, and Neptune, with the rest, like mere phantoms of mist and transient exhalations, break and dissolve into the original and all pervading Mind. The souls of men they considered as rays from that Mind im-

prisoned in dark earthly bodies, which could only escape and recover their former liberty by keeping themselves pure from the contamination of matter. This doctrine, though dimly and imperfectly traced out, seems to have given the first notion of purgatory, so beautifully developed by Virgil, and so profitably maintained by the Church of Rome.

Thus the unity of the Deity, and the purification, along with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, formed the prominent topics in the ancient mysteries.

VI. As the priesthood had an outward and inward religion, so the philosophers had an outward and an inward philosophy. Philosophy began exactly at the point where the more refined systems of superstition ended. The earliest corruptions of religion consisted in assigning animating principles, or souls, to the elements, and the separate portions of nature. The latter, and more elaborate superstition of the priesthood was founded on the belief of one universal soul actuating the whole of nature. From this point the earliest speculations of Grecian philosophy commenced ; at least that branch of it which was derived from the Egyptian. Thales, and his successors, held a mundane soul, that is, a soul immersed in matter, and actuating it from within ; and it was not till the time of Anaxagoras that the doctrine of a supramundane soul was maintained, that is, of a soul actuating matter from without, unconfined, impassive, and immaterial.

Hitherto two principles were admitted in nature independent, self-originating, and ever-existing, Matter and Mind. But the higher philosophy of the east went a step further, and simplifying the theory of existence, admitted but one original principle, Mind, of which Matter was the dark and degenerate offspring; Mind being the bright centre and fount of all things, but becoming gross and dim as it flowed at a distance from its source. This system of emanation prevailed over the east, and was introduced amongst the Greeks by Pythagoras. In his school it underwent some slight modifications, till at last, among the elder Eleatic sect, it passed into a still higher system, that of strict Pantheism, which not only does not admit of more than one principle, but excludes any other being than what arises from visionary and deceptive appearances, excepting only the one absolute and universal existence. Pantheism again passed into transcendental atheism, and became similar to many systems which still prevail in the east. The one existence being considered as above the reach of our comprehension, and being every way infinite, is affirmed to be without attributes and modifications, and thus to have as little affinity with mind as with matter. Hence the first cause has been termed an infinite nothing. These doctrines passed on the one side into the absolute and universal scepticism of Pyrrhonism, and on the other into the opposite system of atomic atheism, which, going to the contrary extreme, admitted of no exist

ence but that which came within the sphere of the senses.

Thus the world by wisdom knew not God; the more they reasoned the more they departed from the truth. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Nothing can be more striking than the incongruity and absurdity of the notions and arguments of the most eminent men of antiquity in their attempts to reason on the nature of the first Cause. This is exhibited within a short compass in Cicero's eloquent treatise concerning the nature of the gods. No doubt their absurdities lose nothing by passing through his hands, and had they been accompanied by the elaborate trains of reasoning which led to them, they would have appeared more specious than when represented in the nakedness of their ridiculous and jarring conclusions. Still these conclusions are presented by Cicero with considerable accuracy, and with great beauty and spirit; and afford an admirable commentary to St. Paul's remarks on Gentile wisdom.

It is true that Socrates, in his striking and original efforts to discover truth, promised to bring back the philosophy of Greece to saner views; but though the genius of Socrates lent its colouring to many of the systems which followed him, yet his sobriety of investigation had few imitators. Plato added the dreams and wonders of Pythagoras to the more prac-

tical tenets of his master, and lost himself in his favourite ideal world, instead of looking at existence in its actual condition. Nor were the varying and contradictory opinions of Aristotle concerning the first Mover, though more destitute of imagination, on that account, nearer to the truth. Many of the Stoick dogmas, though sounding high and plausible concerning the divine nature, are yet found, when examined upon the genuine principles of their philosophy, to have more show than significance. Nor was there any hope of amendment in new systems springing up, for the Grecians were continually reasoning upon false principles, and the more accurately they reasoned, the more erroneous and monstrous were their conclusions.

The best and most correct opinions concerning religion which the ancients possessed, were those which were handed down to them from remote antiquity, which were celebrated in the writings of their moral poets, and which their legislators adopted and inculcated in order to give a sanction to their laws. These form the outer doctrines of philosophy, and are very superior to the tenets of the inner school. In these outer doctrines, the philosophers considered not what was true, but what was useful ; and they showed themselves much better judges of utility than of truth. They were ignorant of the simple demonstration which proves that general utility and truth must be for ever coincident. Hence the pernicious and perplexing division of their doctrines into the exoteric

and esoteric ; the first adapted to the world at large : the second hurtful, if generally promulgated, but which might be revealed to the few who were devoted to the pursuit of wisdom. Thus in their own estimation, their whole stock of opinions were made up of useful errors and dangerous truths. But in the absence of just principles, as it is more easy to discover what is useful than what is true, their supposed errors were often truths, and their supposed truths were always errors.

Entangled in the web of their own double doctrine ; and at best, by no means remarkable, notwithstanding their genius, even in their most lucid moments, for perspicuity and consistency, they expressed themselves so vaguely and figuratively, that they leave ample room for the conjectures, disputes, and mistakes of commentators. We are principally indebted to the vigorous mind and sagacious learning of Warburton for first pointing out determinately the real opinions of the ancient philosophers respecting the nature of the Deity and of the soul, and also for placing in the clearest light the ultimate principle upon which these reasonings proceeded.

VII. The philosophy of the ancients took its form and character from their entire ignorance of the principle of creation, and from their denial of the possibility of any other change than a change of form, and the giving a new mould to pre-existing materials. Thus whatever had real existence was eternal, it was only the modifications of that existence which were

temporary. Hence the belief that matter and mind were both of them self-existing and ever-enduring ; and hence, the obvious conclusion, that all finite souls were but rays emitted from the original Mind, and would soon return to the ocean from which they had been for a moment exhaled.

But the doctrine of two principles yielded to the belief of one principle, as being a more harmonious and comprehensive scheme of philosophy, and hence Pantheism, or the considering the universe as God, the one and only true existence, has chiefly prevailed in all ages and countries where revelation has been unknown.

In the scheme of Pantheism, the great difficulty is to account for finite existence ; this has given rise to two systems, emanative philosophy, and Pantheism strictly so called. The emanative philosophy considers all changes as taking place in the divine substance itself ; but Pantheism considers all changes to be merely deceptions, yet it fails to account for the origin of illusion, nor can it explain in what manner this can have any place in the infinite Mind. The system of emanation has most generally prevailed ; it is not only found in numerous schools of philosophy, but many of the ancient superstitions have been remodelled on its basis. The mythology of the Hindoos has been recast upon this model by the ancient Braminical priesthood, while the opposing doctrines of Boudh derive their character from Pantheism strictly so called. These systems have reappeared in modern

times, both in the east and in the west, and have given rise to peculiar modifications in mystical devotion, which shall afterwards be noticed. It is thus that opinions descend lower and lower in the scale of mind, and that the errors of ancient genius become the heresies of modern sectarians.

VIII. Thus we observe, that the great and ever-recurring error of the ancients proceeds from their ignorance of creation. The substance of all things they supposed to be necessarily eternal. Forms might be changed, but essences were for ever the same; and all essences were but one essence, the one eternal and unbounded existence. Possessed with this false principle, the more they reasoned upon it, the deeper they sunk into error; it haunted them on every side, and blinded them to every sane notion of God, of nature, and of themselves. It is the view which all reasoners unacquainted with revelation have taken of existence; and it is the view into which men have ever a tendency to relapse whenever they trust to their own reason, and are not guided implicitly by revelation in their speculations concerning the Divine Being. There was not the least prospect that the Gentile philosophers could ever have shaken off this error, unless they had been furnished with a strength not their own. All their flights of speculation, all their ceaseless inquiries and discussions, served only to rivet more firmly upon them the maxim that from nothing, nothing could be produced. No strength of understanding

availed them to find out the truth ; once departing from the right way, the more rapidly and prosperously they proceeded, the more inextricably they were involved in error ; nor was the prospect brighter for any future and distant age. One theory, indeed, rapidly gave place to a succeeding one ; but all theories were erected upon the same false basis, and were merely modifications and expansions of the same fundamental mistake. Nor when invention was exhausted, and new theories ceased to be brought forward, was any approach made to the discovery of the truth. The strength of mind which had expended itself in originality was, in after ages, employed in defending the errors of others ; and the genius of Greece not only proved that the highest efforts of the human mind, when unassisted from on high, were unavailing to find out the true God ; but they also enchained the understandings of other nations, and future ages, to submit, in blind acquiescence, to the authority and maxims of Grecian philosophy.

If ever truth could have been discovered and excogitated by the human mind itself, it must have been in the favoured times and situation of Greece ; the human faculties were then in the full stretch of exertion, and had reached the highest point of enthusiasm and power. The Greeks are far too favourable a sample of the unassisted understanding of man ; they were placed in peculiar circumstances

by Providence to show that the mind of man, in its very best estate, is, when trusting to itself, but emptiness and vanity ; that there is no true knowledge of nature to be obtained, except by humble and patient investigation ; and no true knowledge of God, except by child-like docility, and humble attention, to what he himself is pleased to reveal.

Neither in latter days has the mind of man gained in strength, though it has in information ; as soon as it departs even now from revelation, though surrounded on all sides by light, it immediately falls into the same darkness, and the same errors. The infidel writers in modern times, as we shall afterwards have occasion to notice, have run into the same absurdities respecting the first Cause, and the nature and origin of existence, without having the knowledge and the sagacity of the Grecian philosophers, to defend and to conceal their blunders. Even those who receive revelation, but who presume to be wise above what is written, the moment they leave the inspired record, and speculate upon things which are not revealed, share also in the common lot, and amply prove, by their weakness and their errors, that it is the Bible, and the Bible alone, where we are to find all our information respecting our author and our end,—respecting the character of God as our Judge and our Saviour,—respecting that heavenly inheritance which is awaiting every believer in the Lord Jesus, after death has removed him from this transitory state.

IX. The more we consider the highest efforts of the human understanding, the more we shall perceive its feebleness, and the narrow limits which confine it; and the more, also, we shall perceive, with increasing evidence, that the Scriptures are the word of God, and not of man. The very first verse of Genesis is impressed with the stamp of its divine original; the reception of it alone would have overturned all the fundamental errors which perplexed the philosophy of Greece, and not of Greece only, but of all countries not enlightened by revelation. The Jews had obtained the knowledge of the true God, and with it the principle of true philosophy, which considers nature not as a necessary existence, but as the creature and handmaid of the Almighty, and the laws of nature, not as the unalterable conditions of being, but as the manner in which unchangeable Wisdom operates to confer the highest benefits, and clearly to manifest his preservation and government of the world.

Here we may see the difference between that which is discoverable by reason, and that which is demonstrable by reason when once discovered. None of the reasoners of Greece, by the force of their natural powers, were able to discern that the world was not formed out of pre-existing materials, but that it received the commencement of its being, as well as the mode of it, by the fiat of the Divine will. But, after revelation clearly manifested that all things were created by God, many Christian

writers, and amongst the rest Dr. Clarke, in his well-known treatise on the Divine attributes, has forcibly proved, by the light of reason alone, that the world was not only formed, but created by its Almighty Author. This view gives a totally different aspect to all things, and removes the creation to an infinite distance from the Creator. There is no longer any room for the imaginary universe of the Pantheists. Jehovah, the self-existent and all-perfect Being, with the worlds which he created, and which he is ever ruling, alone meets our view. Though intimately present with all his works, he is yet entirely distinct from them. In him we live, and move, and have our being. He is infinitely high to us, and he is intimately present with us, while we remain infinitely distant from his all-perfect and incommunicable essence.



PART SECOND.

EARLY CORRUPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

- I. Corruption of Religion amongst the Jews
- II. Jewish Corruptions of Christianity.
- III. Gnostic Corruptions.
- IV. Sabellianism.
- V. Arian and Semi-Arian Heresies.
- VI. Trinitarian Disputes and Divisions.
- VII. Corruptions from Gentile Philosophy.
- VIII. Corruption from Gentile Superstition.
- IX. Pretenders to an additional Revelation.
- X. Mohammedanism.

PART II.

EARLY CORRUPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

I. THE whole of history, and especially the history of religion, is but a commentary on the alienation of the fallen mind of man from the truth, and on that evil heart of unbelief which is ever seeking to depart from the living God. The immediate descendants of Noah, by their speedy forsaking the true religion, showed how soon an unwritten revelation is lost; and if rites are preserved, as the rite of sacrifice was, they are perpetuated without any just reference to the object they were designed to point out. And, when the truth is once lost, we perceive how vain are all unassisted attempts to recover it, even when every surrounding circumstance is most favourable.

The history of the Jews, on the other hand, shows the tendency of mankind to depart from a written revelation upheld by sensible interpositions of Providence, and by manifest displays of Divine power. Though the Jewish religion had preserved in their purity the doctrines which constituted the

primeval revelation given to mankind, with the addition of new discoveries of Divine goodness and holiness, and though this dispensation, being maintained by permanent writings, as well as by renewed intimations of the Divine will, could not be obliterated from the minds of men in the same manner as the patriarchal dispensation, yet the Jews ever showed an equal tendency to relapse into the same errors as the other nations, though that tendency was continually counteracted. There is no proof that the Jews ever embraced the idolatry of the Egyptians, in its peculiar details ; but, from their proneness to sense, finding the extreme difficulty of keeping the notion of the Deity in minds immersed in matter, and engrossed with the present animal life, they were ever seeking for some visible representation with which to embody the Divine presence. And the symbol that most naturally occurred to them was that of the ox, as they had seen it worshipped in Egypt. They still more easily slid into the Canaanitish idolatries from first using the high places and groves and other sacred resorts of the Canaanites for their own worship, serving the true God in forbidden places, and then by another step of defection, exchanging their own rites for the rites which had formerly been practised under the same groves and upon the same high hills.

The difficulty which many unbelievers have insisted much upon, with respect to the Jews reverting to an idolatrous worship, while they are asserted to

have had continual miracles placed before them, is not of much weight. Miracles are an appeal to the senses, and it is not in their nature to counteract the over tendency to sensible objects, except as far as they direct the attention of the beholder beyond themselves, to the doctrines of which they are a confirmation. Miracles establish indeed the truth of the religion which they accompany. But it was not the truth of their religion which the Jews doubted, but its spirituality, from which they declined. They were beset, not with sceptical doubts, but with material images, and found a relief from the exercise of the higher faculties of their minds in reposing their belief and their trust on what was obvious to their senses.

It has been considered still more incredible that when miracles were said to cease, idolatry ceased also, and that the Jews, deprived of their prophets and of supernatural aid and interferences, still continued to adhere to the worship of the true God, which worship they had forsaken when miraculously led by Moses, and when surrounded by visible interpositions of divine power.

But we must recollect that when miracles had ceased, many of the causes of idolatry had ceased also. The Canaanites were no longer in the land ; their altars and their rites were forgotten. There were no ten tribes remaining to establish a political idolatry in opposition to the house of Judah. On the contrary, the new Samaritans were provoking

the Jews to jealousy by their rivalry in the worship of Jehovah. It is prosperity which inclines men to novelty, but adversity makes them cling to whatever is ancient and national, and above all, fondly, and even obstinately to retain their former and peculiar opinions, as connected with the remembrances of their ancient glory. But even had they been otherwise minded, and had their temptations to idolatry been as strong as they were weak, the antipathy of their Persian lords to the worship of idols was an additional inducement to them to reject all visible objects of adoration. The Greeks, indeed, were eminently Polytheists, but before they had become the masters of Western Asia, the reverence which they paid to their idols had greatly declined, and philosophy, with scepticism in its train, had been gaining ground on the popular belief.

II. The belief of the Jews after their return from captivity, though free from idolatry, was yet infected by fables, and corrupted by traditions and the doctrines of men. Where religion does not reform man after its own image, and stamp him with a divine character, man necessarily brings down religion to the likeness and level of human infirmity and error. Among the Jews, though outwardly strongly attached to the religion of Moses, the form of truth alone remained without its spirit ; and the divine doctrines, clouded and concealed by a mass of pretended interpretations, lost much of their heavenly character, and in the carnal mind of the Jews, had their pros-

pects and promises fulfilled and terminated by the objects and boundaries of this world. In their view, the predicted reign of the Messiah was to be similar in its nature to the earthly empires which had preceded it, and its principal design, as it presented itself to their imagination, was fully as much to give a worldly pre-eminence to the Jews, as to bring in the other nations to the knowledge of the true God. No wonder they misconceived the nature of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, when even our existence after death, and our immortality in the heavenly state, seemed to them similar to our existence here, and to be but the endless repetition of the present life.

When Christianity did not convert such men, and give them a new mind, its doctrines, at the best, must have been very imperfectly apprehended, and seen through the discoloured medium of every prejudice which then prevailed. Among the Jews of our Saviour's time, we may find the type of every future heresy concerning his character and person. So that all those opposers of the truth who insist upon the antiquity of their opinions, may indeed find their predecessors as ancient as Christianity itself. There were those who considered Christ as an impostor ; "he deceiveth the people." Others adopted the second alternative of infidelity, and esteemed him a wild enthusiast. "He is mad, why do you hear him?" Others, with the anti-supernaturalists of Germany, approved his doctrine and

his character without admitting his divine authority. "He is a good man." Others again went as far as the Socinians, "He is a prophet." While others, with the various shades of Arianism, entertained some vague and ill-determined notions of his super-human dignity. And all agreed, with the heretics of the present day, in admitting as much and as little of the truth of Christ's doctrines as suited their inclinations or their prejudices, the one taking care that the authority of their scribes and doctors, the other that the authority of reason, should receive no detriment from their belief in the Redeemer.

III. After the corruptions of Christianity received from its many false converts amongst the Jews, the next errors were the heresies which sprung from the Gnostic philosophy. The emanative system, which considers all beings as flowing out from the divine fountain of existence, had been long and widely prevalent in the east. But Gnosticism is characterized by this, that it supposes a succession of derivative fountains, through which the stream of life flows onwards to the utmost verge of the universe. These reservoirs, which receive life from the first fountain, in order to communicate it to others, are, in the Gnostic language, called *Æons*. In what precise sense the Gnostics used this Greek term has been much disputed, and well may it be so, since there is nothing precise in the Gnostic philosophy. But as they explained the formation of the world out of the divine substance by an emanation or generation, we

may suppose, that by *Æons*, they meant generations descending one from another, like the generations of men, and continuing in a successive series the long line of existence.

By new distributions of these *Æons*, by varying their numbers, their names, and their situations, without any real change in the ground work of the Gnostic theory, there was abundant room for the idle vanity of the founders of sects, who are ever various without invention. Thus in examining the variety of Gnostic heresies, there is indeed an abundance of barbarous names and monstrous notions; but the same principles are for ever recurring in them all, with a disgusting sameness of repetition. All have the same primal fountain of deity; all have an equal succession of male and female *Æons*; all have the same source and origin of evil. Matter, as being the furthest removed from the fountain of being—the most denuded, of all the divine Parent's offspring, of his glorious attributes—the dark and sluggish produce of mind, was regarded as the source of all defects and of evil. The *Æon* also, who formed this matter into shape, and organized it into the world, as it now exists, from being nearly allied to the matter on which he wrought, was considered as a fallen and evil spirit, opposed to the light, and to the Father of spirits.

Hence the perpetual blasphemy of the Gnostics in confounding the Creator of the world with the evil

principle ; and the souls which the Creator had included in bodies, were viewed by them as miserable captives, restrained by the thralldom of matter, and by vice, which is the consequence of union with matter, from reascending to their native abodes of purity and light.

These miserable dreamers, the Gnostics, divided Christ and Jesus into two distinct persons, Christ they considered as one of the higher *Æons*, Jesus as a lower *Æon*, and sometimes merely as a man. Christ they represented as opposing the designs of the Creator of the world, and by an apparent, though not a real union with a body, and also by uniting himself to Jesus, as having found a way of deliverance for all those souls who should obey his precepts, and extricate themselves from the influence of matter.

From these insane opinions which, however, have their root in the emanative system, proceeded the blasphemies of the Gnostics against the Creator of the world, their abhorrence of the Old Testament, and their rejection of every portion of the New which contained any approving allusion to the Old, and also the idolatrous respect which the Gnostics paid to the sinners condemned in the Old Testament, as if they had been martyrs to the truth, and had, from their Gnostic principles, incurred the wrath of the Demiurgus or Deity of the Old Testament. To such lengths of impiety and absurdity did those

wretched men proceed, who yet considered knowledge as their own peculiar possession. Gnosticism certainly gave considerable trouble and alarm to the early Christians. It had long obtained possession of the countries of the east; it had even infected the Jews before the time of Christianity, and was the origin of their cabalistical system. It was thus a weed which had full possession of the soil. When crushed in one direction, it sprang up in another. Its appearances were also continually varying, according to the different countries from which the Gnostic leaders sprung, and the masters which each of them followed in philosophy.

The different sects which may be classed under Gnosticism were very widely spread, and from the uncouth names by which they are denominated, have a truly formidable appearance. Yet the alarm that was excited by their impiety and their activity gave to them more than their due importance. It is by no means likely that the number of individuals who embraced these errors was ever great, though they were certainly widely scattered. Neither can we properly class the Gnostics as Christians, seeing they did not receive the Scriptures, except very partially, nor had they any true understanding of the doctrines contained in them, but are rather to be regarded as a set of pretended philosophers, who attempted to rear a new structure of their own, by the combination of very discordant materials.

It is important always to keep in mind, that many who oppose Christianity, and many who corrupt it, have never had any notion, however indistinct, of what Christianity really is. They have never given any serious attention to the subject, and their minds are too much pre-occupied with their former errors to listen to the truth without blending it with pre-conceived opinions. Many infidels, in writing against Christianity, have been merely contending with the shadows of their own imagination; and several Gnostic writers, when they attempted to give a philosophic view of Christianity, seem to have made no further acquaintance with it, than to retain by rote some of the names and terms that most frequently occur in the Scriptures, for the purpose of mixing them up with the reveries of their ancient philosophy.

IV. The Jewish Ebionites and Nazarenes, and the Gentile Gnostics, who formed the great body of the early heretics, are not, strictly speaking, to be added to the number of Christians, even in profession. No one thinks of including the Jewish sect of the Essenes among the Greek philosophers, though they borrowed more from the philosophy of Greece than the Ebionites and the Gnostics did from Christianity. As the principal texture of the system of the Essenes was of Jewish origin, they are very justly included amongst the Jews. For the same reason, the Ebionites ought to be esteemed

a Jewish sect also, and the Gnostics to be deemed Gentiles rather than Christians.

But after Christianity had long and widely prevailed, those who were acquainted with the revealed truths of Scripture, began in many instances to attempt to explain the deity of the Saviour, and of the Holy Spirit, sometimes by reasonings, but more frequently by the prevalent philosophy of the day, and when they failed to explain these doctrines, they next endeavoured to explain them away. One of the earliest of these heresies appears to be the Sabellian, which is much older than Sabellius, whose name it takes, and which has survived many ancient errors, and still exists down to the present times. However, it has never retained any large body of followers; those who adopt these opinions generally proceeding further and joining other sects that are still more remote from the truth. In the first instance, they were denominated *partripassians*, from maintaining that God the Father was so intimately united to the man Christ Jesus, that he partook of Christ's sufferings on the cross, while, by the same union, Christ partook of his divinity. But Sabellius, taking lower ground still, as is the usual descent of error; and to avoid the scoffs that were heaped upon Praxeas, and the earliest of these sectaries, for making God the Father suffer upon the cross, asserted that it was not God who was united to Christ, but a divine energy. By this subterfuge, Sabellius avoided some of the arguments that were

directed against his predecessors, but at the same time made a nearer approach to the heresy which is now called Socinianism. To this low point Sabellianism was almost entirely reduced by Paul of Samosata, whose view of the person of the Saviour was little superior to that held by the elder Socinus himself. Such is ever the progress of error from bad to worse; each disciple in succession is emboldened by the hardihood of his master, one truth after another is cast aside, and nothing is retained of Christianity but the name.

Sabellianism differs from most other sects in not rising from any particular system of philosophy, nor did it consist in any strict union amongst those who held similar tenets. It is perhaps too vague and shadowy to form proper materials for a permanent heresy. But it is only on that account the more dangerous. Men of decided piety have often glided into it without being aware that there were departing from the truth which they had formerly maintained. Such was probably the case with Dr. Watts; and Doddridge, if in the latter part of his life he did not entertain similar opinions, was too little aware of their error and their danger. Still more recently, by adopting and promulgating the Sabellian views of Dr. Watts in his later years, several who were formerly esteemed for their piety, gradually departed more and more from sound doctrine, and some appeared altogether to make shipwreck of the faith.

The radical mistake in all these systems, whether heretical or orthodox, which have embroiled mankind in so many scandalous disputes and absurd and pernicious opinions, proceeds from the disposition so natural in man of being wise above what is written. They are not satisfied with believing a plain declaration of the Saviour, "I and the Father are one." They undertake with the utmost presumption and folly to explain in what manner the Father and the Son are one; but man might as well attempt to take up the ocean in the hollow of his hand as endeavour, by his narrow understanding, to comprehend the manner of the divine existence.

V. An equally vain and still more hurtful attempt to accommodate the doctrines of Christianity to the pretended wisdom of this world, arose from a mixture of emanative philosophy with Christian doctrines. Origen, whose tenets are vague and diffusely spread over a multitude of works, but whose opinions may be considered as akin to Sabellianism, delivered, however, in a higher strain of expression, and modified by a loftier philosophy, maintained the Son to be the divine wisdom incarnate, and the Holy Spirit to be the divine Energy. The errors of Origen spread widely and quickly through the Christian world, and fell upon a soil well prepared to produce every noxious weed; for great already was the departure from the simplicity of the truth; and deep was the ignorance both of the genuine spirit of the Scriptures, and of the just extent of the human

faculties ; and many were the vain dreams from philosophy, falsely so called, that were mingling themselves with the discoveries of revelation. The errors of Origen, as might have been expected from his genius, made a deep impression upon the age, and produced other errors both in those who received them and in those who rejected them. Arius, in opposition to the errors of Origen, maintained that Christ was distinct from the Father, and that he was only the first of creatures. The Arians, in their turn, gave rise to the Semi-Arians, with their miscellaneous collection of almost inconceivable absurdities, several of whom held, that though Christ was really a creature, yet that he became of the same essence with God by privilege. Amongst these Sectarians, Macedonius distinguished himself in heresy by his pertinacious opposition to the proper Deity of the Holy Spirit.

All these heretics agreed in rejecting the absolute divinity of the Saviour, but agreed in nothing else ; they showed the true nature of error, which has no consistency in itself, but whose very being consists in a continual departure from the truth. Thus Arianism, which once distracted the Christian world, and ranked under its standard so many men of eminent talents, who agreed together in what they denied, but differed in what they affirmed, is now itself nearly extinct, and has given place to Socinianism, while Socinianism appears ready to pass over in

name as well as in reality, to the avowed and undisguised enemies of Christianity.

VI. Heresies, however, are not confined to the heterodox. While the Arians and Semi-Arians were corrupting the truth by every subtilty of argument and ingenious perversion of terms, the orthodox all the while were dogmatizing about the divine nature with a profusion of words, which either had no meaning, or were gross mistakes, or inapplicable metaphors when applied to the infinite and spiritual existence of God. And not content with using such arguments against the heretics as generally produced a new heresy without refuting the former one, as soon as they obtained the power they expelled them from the Roman Empire, and sent them with all the zeal which persecution confers, and which the orthodox, from their prosperity, had lost, to spread every variety of error amongst the nations of the barbarians.

Orthodoxy was become a very nice affair, from the the rigour of its terms, and the perplexity of its creed, and very unlike the highway for the simple, which the gospel presents. A slip in a single expression was enough to make a man heretic. The use or omission of a single word occasioned a new rent in Christianity. Every heresy produced a new creed, and every creed a new heresy. The expressions of Nestorius divided Christ into two persons. in opposition to the words of Appollinaris, which seemed to blend his two natures. And these im

pious and unintelligible subtleties, more worthy of bedlam than of the consideration of a sane mind, have lost empires and ruined nations. Works of genius have perished, and their very names have been forgotten ; but the Nestorians and the Jacobites still perpetuate the reputation and the feuds of the quibbling sophists, to whom they owe their divisions. Never does human folly and learned ignorance appear in a more disgusting point of view than in these disputes of Christians amongst themselves, nor does any study appear so well calculated to foster infidelity as the history of Christian sects, unless the reader be guided by light from above, and carefully distinguish the doctrines of the Bible from the miserable disputes of pretended Christians.

VII. Independent of any direct heresies, erroneous methods of considering Christianity became prevalent from the indiscriminate study and admiration of Gentile philosophy. Each of the Christian fathers, who affected a reputation for literature, naturally adopted the favourite opinions of some philosophic school, and thus every speculative sect came to mingle their own peculiar errors in that incoherent and discordant mass of opinions which formed the Christian literature of antiquity. Few attempts have had less foundation to proceed upon than the endeavour to make the Christian fathers pass for the supreme judges of controversy and the oracles of religion. Nothing can be more vague than their conclusions, nor more weak than their arguments, nor

more variable than the tendency of their writings. They might, notwithstanding the weakness of their judgment, have been valuable, as furnishing facts, but in these they are lamentably deficient, and hence the meagreness of church history. When appealed to as authorities, they lend themselves by turns to every side ; when resorted to for information, they furnish little but conjectures. It is well, however, that Christianity should have small obligation to its early advocates, and that religion should rest upon the power of God and not upon the authority of men. It is well also that a great gulf should be placed between the inspired and the uninspired Christian writers.

Many of the fathers, as they are called, were but recent converts from paganism, who were better acquainted with the superstition they had left than the revelation they had embraced. Many were more attentive to the study of philosophy than to the search of scriptural truth. The caution of St. Paul was lost upon them to beware of philosophy falsely so called. The emanative system, with all its errors, spread far and wide, under the authority of Origen, and with the aid of his allegorical interpretations. In the hands of the master of Origen, Ammonius, and his fellow disciple Plotinus, the absurdities of Paganism, by the supposition of an inner sense contained in them had been made to coincide with the dreams of philosophy. The truths of Christianity were now to be explained

away by the same subtle process. Evil was considered less a transgression of the holy law of God than as distance from the supreme fountain of existence. A Christian purgatory was introduced similar to the platonic purgation by fire, and all souls after certain cycles of aberration and remedial punishment, were supposed to be destined to return to the one great Being from whom they had departed. From another quarter false notions of Gnostic purity flowed in to augment the superstitions of the declining church, and the division was revived in the distinction between the monks and the laity among the orthodox, (which had previously prevailed amongst the early heretics and the Manicheans,) of the perfect, who abstained from flesh and lacerated their body, and of the imperfect, who merely performed the duties of life. The doctrines of Plato, from the degree of resemblance which they occasionally bear to revelation, insinuated themselves with ease among the truths of Christianity. The old Pantheistic error of God including all being within himself had likewise numerous advocates, and so confused were the notions of its adherents, that it might be doubted of many, as in the case of Bishop Synesius and the false Dionysius, whether they were more properly heathen Pantheists or Christian Mystics. To sum up all, Aristotle, after stoutly defending Paganism, at last lent the Christians his vexatious logic to exasperate the multitude

of their disputes, and to split and subdivide every error to infinity.

VIII. While the higher classes were bewildered with Gentile philosophy, the lower classes were darkened with Gentile superstition. As a vague belief in Christianity, without exactly understanding its nature, grew and prevailed amongst multitudes, the door of the church was held more widely open to receive the Heathen, not forsaking their errors, but bringing their superstition along with them. They were said to be converted, who were never rightly instructed; and every expedient was adopted which might render the change from Paganism to Christianity, falsely so called, easy and scarcely perceptible. Christian martyrs took the place of pagan heroes; the same altar, in succession, served for both; the incense which was burnt before the pagan idol was afterwards offered up to honour the Christian image. Even the holy water used by the Pagans was plentifully sprinkled upon the too credulous believers. Wherever any peculiar superstition locally prevailed among the heathen, that very custom in the same place was found to be revived by the Christians, with no other change save that of names. It is true, that many of these practices were at first deemed heretical, but they were afterwards adopted, in substance at least, among the superstitions of the Romish church. For example, the Arabians had always offered a peculiar adoration to the moon. When a part of Arabia became

christianized, there the sect of the Collyridians sprung up, offering the same cakes to the Virgin Mary which they had formerly offered to Diana, and invoking both of them, by the same title of the Queen of Heaven. The Romanists have discontinued the offering of the cakes, but have retained the worst part of the heresy—the idolatrous appellation and worship.

IX. Several heresies arose from the notion that Christianity admitted of amendments and additions. The Gnostics thought to improve it by the help of their philosophy, and Montanus by giving it a severer cast of morals; Manes by explaining the origin of evil upon the system of Zoroaster; and Mahomet by reducing revelation, as he conceived, to its original purity and simplicity. Understanding the predictions of the Paraclete or Comforter, as distinct from the promise of the Holy Spirit, each flattered himself that he was the person designated as the future teacher of the believers. In the comparative rarity of the copies of Scripture, and amidst the daring assertions of the early heretics that these copies had been falsified, ample scope was given for the invention and production of many spurious gospels. On this ground Manes brought forward his new gospel or revelation, which he called *Ertang*, and Mahomet argued the necessity of the Koran, on account of the supposed interpolations in the earlier Scriptures, which had been previously given to mankind. It is thus that Christianity had

to struggle, first with the open opposition of all the corrupt systems in the world, and then with the new errors produced by the monstrous combination of these systems with the truth. It had first to contend with the idolatry of Paganism, and then with the disguised idolatry of Popery under a Christian name. Again it had to contend with the systems of the Gentile philosophers, and a second time it had to oppose the same systems when they assumed the appearance of Christianity in the works of many early Christian writers. And in the same way it had a double warfare to maintain against the avowed and concealed hostility of the dark and speculative theories of the east, till at last it encountered and was borne down by a new and victorious heresy, not maintained by verbal subtleties, but at the points of an hundred thousand lances.

X. The race of Shem departed less widely from the memory and institutions of the patriarchal times than the other descendants of Noah ; and the tribes that sprung from Abraham maintained a still more distinct recollection of the unity of God. Though the body of the Arabians were idolators, their poets and more eminent men preserved the worship of One Supreme Being, and the traditions of ancient prophets, and of the true religion, were occasionally revived throughout Arabia by colonies of dispersed Jews, and by the escape of persecuted and sectarian Christians. There are many noble and just passages in the Arabian poems respecting the Deity, pre-

vious to the pretended revelation of Mahomet. What was new in the Koran to his cotemporaries was not his assertion of the unity of the Godhead, but his vehement suppression of idolatry, and his earnestly contending that God had no companions. while the most enlightened of those who opposed him were desirous that the adoration of idols should be associated with the worship of the Deity, on account of the gain and political influence they derived from the rites of superstition. There is nothing characteristic in the fundamental tenets of Mahometanism to distinguish them except their extreme simplicity, consisting only in the belief of the unity of God, and of a future state of retribution, coupled with the admission of a series of prophets ending in Mahomet. So short a creed is generally united with great coolness and indifferency on the part of the holders, but Mahomet has this peculiarity, that he has joined with it a fierce fanaticism, which still burns with slackened though not extinguished vehemence after so long a lapse of time; and the paucity of his dogmas is amply atoned for by his plentiful allusion to fables, so that there is full scope for the credulity of his followers; and a commentary upon the Koran may nearly take in the whole round of Arabian fiction.

Mahomet alone resembles the ancient legislators of Greece; instead of moulding his laws to men, he still moulds men to his laws. His followers to the present day retain much of the character of their

prophet, and bear stamped upon their souls his image and superscription. They unite, like their martial prophet, the character of the priest and soldier, and want but a similar leader again fiercely to breathe the spirit of victory and Unitarianism. They are little advanced in civilization beyond the warriors that first issued out beyond the Arabian deserts, neither have they sunk down to the luxurious and degenerate character of those corrupted Christians whom the first Moslem subdued. Though Mahometanism has some slight connexion with Christianity, it has a near alliance to Judaism, and is derived less from the Bible than from the misrepresentations of tradition and the reveries of the Rabbins. It bears throughout its structure its marked opposition to the mixture of idolatry with Christianity then prevailing throughout the Roman empire ; and in the two great scourges—Popery and Mahomedism, which God has appointed to chastise the apostacy of his professing people, we observe at once a striking contrast between the fanaticism of the one, and the superstition of the other, and yet a singular coincidence in the time of their rise and of their duration, and in the gradual progress of their present decay, and the signs of their approaching termination.

PART THIRD.

POPERY.

- I. Partial and General Corruption of Christianity.
- II. Changes of the Primitive Church.
- III. The Power of the Bishop of Rome.
- IV. Assimilation of Christianity to Judaism and Paganism.
- V. Final Identity of Paganism and Popery.
- VI. Popery contains a Part of many Ancient heresies.
- VII. Absurdity of Popery impossible to be concealed.
- VIII. Popery a gross counterfeit of true Religion.
- IX. Persecutions of Pagan and Papal Rome.
- X. Popes and Emperors of Rome.
- XI. Popery as described by Revelation.
- XII. Destruction of Popery.

PART III.

POPERY.

I. THE source of all departure and distance from the truth is the opposition of the fallen mind of man to the character of God. The same principle which, in later ages, has induced men to give up one principle after another in Christianity till they stripped it of every thing which gave distaste to a carnal mind, led them, in former times, when the gospel was first proposed to them, to blend and neutralize the truth by mixing it with previous errors. The Socinian of the present day acts from the same motive as the Gnostic of the primitive ages; both unite in degrading the Bible from being the ultimate rule of belief, and the first gives the supreme authority to his reason which the other ascribed to his knowledge or his philosophy. But though error is as permanent as the state of the unrenewed mind, the forms in which error manifests itself are continually varying. Many of the ancient heresies are extinct, and all the rest, except one, are vanishing away. That heresy, which differs from all the rest, both in its extent and duration, was pointed out by the apostles as the

great apostacy, which was to last for twelve hundred and sixty years, during the greater part of which time the true church was to flee to the wilderness, and to dwell apart from the concourse of men, far removed from general observation. The Gnostic errors are forgotten, the Sabellians have never been able to hold together, the Arians are insignificant and far in the wane, the subtle disputes of the east are trampled under foot by the contempt and oppression of the Moslem; but popery still triumphs and enslaves some of the fairest portions of the earth, though a part of its battlements and dungeons fell at the reformation.

The early Christians were by no means aware of the extent of their danger when they enumerated only the heresies and the heretics that were without the church. The same errors were also spreading within. Those who are vehement and determined in their errors, naturally separated themselves from others, and distinguished themselves by a peculiar name; while the many, through whose minds the same erroneous notions of philosophy or superstition were vaguely floating, remained included in the bosom of the church. As the multitude of believers increased, the number of crude and mistaken opinions, they brought with them were multiplied also, and the study of the Scriptures, the only cure for these evils, was either neglected or pursued upon visionary principles. While the doctors of the church were refuting heretics, they were often cherishing in

their own writing the seeds of future heresies, and the tone of feeling, and the mode of thinking among Christians was rapidly receding from the standard of Scripture and the oracles of truth.

II. While the primitive creed of Christians was receiving many additions from the accession of foreign opinions, the constitution of the primitive church underwent a variety of changes also. In all institutions where men are concerned, there is an unceasing fluctuation. The same names and forms may be retained when the ancient spirit is departed. An influx of new members, and a tide of prosperity, of themselves produce an internal revolution in human governments, and the conquerors of other nations find themselves vanquished and enslaved by the very victories they have obtained. The checks upon power, and the securities for liberty, which are sufficient in a scanty community, and in the midst of adverse circumstances, are found too feeble to oppose to the current and corruption of prosperity, and the enlarged influence which increasing success confers.

“The government of the church,” as Gibbon observes, “has often been the subject as well as prize of religious contention. The hostile disputants of Rome, of Paris, of Oxford, and of Geneva, have alike struggled to reduce the primitive and apostolic model to the respective standards of their own policy.” But though every sectarian beholds the image of his own church and denomination, in the

slight notices which are transmitted to us of the apostolical churches, and though all are thus at variance with each other, still there is a considerable agreement amongst the writers who have regarded the subject without self-interest and party zeal, and with the tranquil indifference of mere historians. At the same time there is a manifest difference between the complete certainty with which the leading doctrines of Christianity can be ascertained, and the slight degree of probability with which we conjecture as to the mode in which the rites of Christianity were administered, or the degree of authority with which its office-bearers were invested.

The primitive church was distinguished for its simplicity and its freedom; that simplicity is probably the cause of many of the disputes concerning its form. Had the structure of its constitution been more intricate, and more essential to be known, it would doubtless have been detailed to us with more precision and minuteness. As the Bible contains merely hints and indications concerning it, these notices are too slight to counteract the views which prejudice will ever shape in accordance to present interest. The Christian church, as far as we can gather its genuine form from the Scriptures, appears somewhat different from that of any body of believers at present existing. It seems to have possessed a more catholic spirit, and to have had a less defined and rigid outline. The disciples of our Saviour were members of the Jewish church at the time when Christ

chose his twelve apostles to be the twelve foundation stones, he himself being the chief corner stone, of the new spiritual edifice. As the apostles corresponded to the princes of the twelve tribes, so the seventy disciples occupied the place of the Sanhedrim of the Jews. While Christianity was confined to the Jewish nation, there was but one church or popular assembly that met together at Jerusalem; every believer was considered as a citizen of the spiritual Israel, and each had an equal vote, not only in the appointment of deacons, for the administration of their temporal affairs, but also in the choice of the names which were to be presented before the Lord in order that the sacred lot might determine who was to fill the vacancy in the apostleship occasioned by the apostacy of Judas. The subsequent appointment of the deacons also shows that the government of the Christian church was not formed upon a previously defined model, but gradually adapted itself to the pressure of immediate circumstances, and could be enlarged as expediency required.

When the gospel was carried to a distance from Judea, the believers could no longer assemble together as one body at Jerusalem. New assemblies or churches were therefore formed in those cities where the gospel had been preached, and where converts were numerous. And these churches were not rigidly confined to the model of Jerusalem, where affairs were transacted by a form of government similar to that of the Jewish republic: but each church

amongst the Gentiles, was constituted upon the simplest form of a free assembly, under the direction of elders popularly elected, and with the assistance of deacons.

It is one of the most difficult questions in history whether the terms Bishops and Presbyters are exactly synonymous, though an Episcopalian finds no difficulty in deciding that Bishops were distinct from the Presbyters, nor does a Presbyterian usually hesitate to affirm the contrary. So much light do our personal circumstances often reflect back on the darkness of antiquity. It is however certain that the bishops soon exalted themselves above the rest of the elders, and became the perpetual presidents of the presbytery, when they were not discarded from their office by the same popular votes which had formerly elevated them to it.

As the Christian churches resembled the ancient republics in their freedom, so also in their factions. The abuse of their liberty was one principal cause of their loss of it. Their love of novelty, their personal attachments, their internal dissensions, kept the churches in continual agitation. The same spirit of emulation and strife, the same ambition of following some party leader which is reproved in St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, continued to harass Christian congregations in succeeding ages; and the change and dismissal of office-bearers, without any fault on their part, may be considered as one leading

cause of the advancement of that authority which ecclesiastical governors afterwards acquired.

In the early Christian writers we find not only remonstrances against the fickleness of the people, but an attempt to prove that the authority of each office bearer was from God, on the ground that the general government of the church was acknowledged to be divine. And many, among the more peaceable of the believers, were doubtless inclined to assent to such reasoning, in the hope of seeing their differences and distractions terminated by the settlement of some authority which might enforce universal regard.

Nor were the generality of the early Christian congregations, from the materials with which they were composed, likely to observe, on the one hand, a well regulated measure of freedom, or, on the other hand, to detect the commencing encroachments of power. Slavery had worn out the numbers and consequence of the middle class, and was gradually wasting the Roman empire, before Christianity appeared. There remained but the two extremes of society in many parts of the country, a few luxurious and overgrown landed proprietors, and the herds of bondsmen who were employed in cultivating the soil. No doubt, in great towns, in which Christianity was first preached and established, society retained longer its ancient variety of ranks and conditions. Still even there slaves formed a large portion of the members of the churches; and their times of assembling together for worship, either early in the

morning, or late in the evening, not only indicated a fear of persecution, but the necessity that many of the Christians were under of working the greater part of the Lord's day under their Egyptian task-masters. Amongst the many depressed by their condition, and limited in their opportunity of instructing themselves in sacred knowledge, there were doubtless several rich men, and here and there a philosopher, whose learning and leisure, however, instead of being employed in the pursuit of truth, were too often expended in idle and pernicious speculations.

In these miscellaneous elements, of which the first Christian societies were composed, there was too much agitation and ferment, too little of a regular check against the assumption of power by their rulers. Another cause of the increase of the power of the bishops arose from the persecutions of the government under which they lived. The Christian converts, finding no protection from the heathen magistrates of their country, naturally looked up in the midst of their wrongs and oppressions for consolation and advice, if not for assistance, to their bishop, who, of course, was their judge in any disputes that might occur amongst themselves, and who thus united some portion of civil power to ecclesiastical authority. Persecution gave also new eminence to the bishops, placed, as they were, in front of danger, and only too ready to become martyrs to the Christian cause.

But, perhaps, the greatest accession to their authority proceeded from the number of converts now too numerous to meet together in any one place, but who, though partially separated into different congregations, yet remained attached to the main body of believers, and continued under the same head, without forming distinct church government of their own. Had each assembly of Christians, when too numerous to be conveniently united, divided itself into new bodies, all formed after the same model of government, many of the evils which overspread the Christian world would have been nipt in the bud. It was, however, natural to regard the Mother Church with reverence, and to keep up their dependence on its long established and venerated authority. Hence, instead of having bishops of their own, the affiliated assemblies were governed by presbyters deputed by the general bishop, and a bishopric grew up, from being merely the superintendency of a small upper room, to comprehend within the sweep of its authority many of the surrounding towns and villages.

III. While bishops gradually subjected to their authority the city in which they lived, and its surrounding district all the bishops in their turn gradually became subordinate to the bishop of the Metropolis. Christian churches at first resembled a number of small independent republics scattered through the Roman empire, and often removed to a

considerable distance from each other. They had a common interest but no common government. They had the same objects and the same dangers, but no established medium of union and communication. The ancient cities of Greece had been placed in somewhat similar circumstances, and laboured under the same difficulties, and adopted the only means of removing them by assembling a general meeting of delegates from each city, as in the case of the Paionian confederacy, or the Amphictyonic council, where the rites of religion were regulated, and political dangers provided against. These ancient councils were first imitated by the Christians in Greece, but from the advantages derived from them, rapidly spread over the Roman empire.

The bishops received a new increase of authority by being the delegates and representatives of their respective flocks at these councils, but their power, while it seemed to be advanced by them, was gradually undermined. Though all the bishops were equal in office, they did not represent churches of equal importance, wealth, and power. He who represented the capital city of the province necessarily carried more weight with him than the delegate of an obscure and scanty population. When a president was to be chosen for the council, the choice naturally fell upon the metropolitan bishop, and a primacy of rank was thus conceded to him, while he,

in addition to this, claimed, and whenever he had opportunity, exerted a primacy of power. Thus, the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch became supreme over the provinces of Syria and Egypt, while the Bishop of Rome, as the chief and representative of the church in the imperial city, assumed a supremacy over the whole Roman empire.

This claim, however extravagant, is less absurd than the arguments on which it rests. In looking around among the apostles for some one superior to his brethren, the choice naturally fell upon Peter for a patron, and upon the declaration made to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." But the difficulty was to point out any connexion between Peter and the Church of Rome. There is no authority to prove that St. Peter was ever at Rome. Jerusalem, not Rome, was his proper residence, and if he had any authority to bequeath to the locality in which he lived, Jerusalem, not Rome, must have profited by it, and become the seat of the spiritual empire. But, above all, in this attempt at reasoning, there is the confusion of the authority of an apostle with that of a bishop, of an authority strictly personal, consisting in being an eyewitness of Christ's miracles, and being the organ of divine revelation,—an authority which was therefore incommunicable by succession, and the authority of a primitive bishop which consisted in teaching and ruling a single meeting of Christians. The pope has been equally prosperous as a reasoner in

temporals and spirituals. He has succeeded to an authority which St. Peter never possessed, and which, even if it had been possessed, could never, from the nature of things, have been transmitted. And by an equally successful use of logic, he has obtained, as the heir of the fishermen of Galilee, the banks of the Tiber and the lordship of the eternal city.

IV. While the Christian doctrines were changed, and the form of church government altered, the simple rites of Christianity were also disguised by ceremonies borrowed from the Jews and from the Pagans. There was much in the Jewish religion, when imperfectly and carnally understood, to please the vitiated taste, and to allure the self-interest of a corrupted priesthood. The pomp of a ceremonial worship was heightened in its allurements by the ample and fixed revenue of the tythes. It was in vain to observe that these ceremonies were no longer of use, since they were fulfilled and terminated in the Saviour : and that the tythes were not the portion of a peculiar order, but of a whole tribe, who received them as a compensation, being excluded from all territorial possessions, except towns for residence. The Christian priesthood, corrupted from their first purity, dwelt with much more pleasure upon these costly oblations of the Old Testament, than on the example of St. Paul working with his own hands, or upon the simple maxim that the labourer is worthy of his hire. It has been said that the proprietors of land voluntarily gave up the tenth part of the

produce for the support of the priesthood, and this is true ; but it is also true that they had previously been informed by their instructors that the curse of God would rest upon them, if they held back what was the unalienable property of the church.

The Popes and the priesthood did not confine their imitation to the Jews, but borrowed largely from the heathen ; sometimes they copied from the High Priest of Jerusalem, sometimes from the Pontifex Maximus of Rome ; and not only were the rites of the heathens in a great measure restored, but also a similar worship. Deceased martyrs were avowedly substituted for heathen heroes, and the Christian demons or souls of dead men, like their prototypes in Paganism, were supposed to watch over the concerns of those who paid them this idolatrous homage, to avert the evils that threatened them, and to make intercession in their favour with the Father of spirits.

V. The final and complete identity of Paganism and Popery is exceedingly well proved by Middleton in his ingenious and well written letter from Rome. The sceptical turn of Middleton's mind has injured the popularity and usefulness of his writings, but true Christianity has nothing to fear, however much Popery may suffer, from his attacks, revealed religion must be a gainer from every examination. The subject of the conformity of Popery to Paganism, embracing such a variety of particulars, must suffer always from being abridged, and Middleton

has been as brief as the nature of the case will allow. Still, detached passages, though they lose much by being disjoined from their connexion, are not without their own force and conclusive. Middleton had traced the altars of the Romanists to the altars of the Pagans. His papist adversary of course preferred deriving them from the altar of incense in the temple of Jerusalem; "and is surprised therefore how I can call it heathenish. Yet it is evident, from the nature of that institution, that it was never designed to be perpetual, and that, during its continuance, God would never have approved any other altar, either in Jerusalem, or any where else. But let him answer directly to this plain question. Was there ever *a temple in the world not strictly heathenish* in which there were *several altars all smoking with incense within one view, and at one and the same time*? It is certain that he must answer in the negative, yet it is as certain that there were such temples in Pagan Rome, and are as many still in *Christian Rome*. And since there never was an example of it but what was *paganish* before the times of *Popery*, how is it possible that it could be derived to them from any other source? Or when we see so exact a resemblance in the copy, how can there be any doubt about the original?" Many altars under the same roof indicate many objects of worship, and the Polytheism of the church of Rome is manifested by the first view of the interior of their cathedrals. This similarity in the Polytheism of Paganism and

Popery is most clearly shown in the Pope displacing Jupiter and all the gods from the Pantheon, to make way for the Virgin Mary and all the saints. "The noblest heathen temple now remaining in the world, is the Pantheon or Rotunda, which, as the inscription over the portico informs us, having been 'impiously dedicated of old by Agrippa to Jove, and all the gods, was piously consecrated by Pope Boniface the fourth to the blessed Virgin and all the saints.' With this single alteration it serves as exactly for all the purposes of the popish, as it did for the pagan worship for which it was built. For as in the old temple every one might find the god of his country, and address himself to that deity whose religion he was most devoted to, so it is the same thing now; every one chooses the patron whom he likes best, and one may here see different services going on at the same time at different altars with distinct congregations around them, just as the inclinations of the people lead them to the worship of this or that particular saint."

Middleton shows very well not only that the rites of the Papists are borrowed from the Pagans, but that many of those rites were condemned both by the Christian church, and by the Christian emperors, even when religion was already much corrupted. "The Christian emperors strictly prohibited their pagan subjects to light up candles, offer incense, or hang up garlands to senseless images, for these were then reckoned the notorious acts of genuine Paganism.

Yet now we see all those very acts performed every day in popish countries, to the images of the popish saints. In a word, since there never was an image in the temple of the true God in any age of the world, yet a perpetual use of them in all the temples of the Heathens, it is in vain to dispute about their origin. The thing is evident to a demonstration. They must necessarily be derived to the present Romans, from those who always used, and not from those who always detested them, that is from their pagan, not their Christian ancestors."

One of the remarkable features of the idolatry of the church of Rome, consists in the deification of the Virgin Mary, who is not only saluted with titles as august as those of the goddesses of the pagans, such as *Deipara*, *Regina cœlorum*, *Domina Angelorum*, &c.,* but who has the expressions peculiar to the Saviour applied to herself, so that she is called the gate of salvation; and it is asserted there is no one "who can be saved, O most holy Virgin, but through thee." The Saviour is represented as ready to destroy the world with his just vengeance, but Mary, by her interposition and intercession, averts his deserved wrath. On the high altar of the church of the Recollôts, at Ghent, there is a picture by Rubens thus described by Sir Joshua Reynolds:—"Christ, with Jupiter's thunder and lightning in his hand, denouncing vengeance on a wicked world,

* Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the Angels, &c.

represented by a globe lying on the ground, with the serpent twined round it ; this globe St. Francis appears to be covering and defending with his mantle. The Virgin is holding Christ's hand, and showing her breasts, implying, as I suppose, the right she has to intercede and have an interest with him whom she suckled." In this and in other instances, frequent among the Papists, Christ ceases entirely to be the Saviour of the world, and his place is supplied in their deluded imagination, either by the deified Virgin or some favourite saint. The conformity of the Papists to the Pagans is very observable in the holy water which the Papists themselves derive from the pagan temples, and the lighting up lamps, which the Christian father Lanctantius derides as the folly of the Heathens. "They light up candles to God," says Lanctantius, "as if he lived in the dark ; and do they not deserve to pass for madmen who offer lamps to the Author and Giver of light ?" With respect to votive offerings, Polidore Virgil, after having described this practice of the ancients, "in the same manner," says he, "do we now offer up in our churches little images of wax, and as oft as any part of the body is hurt, as the hand or foot, we presently make a vow to God, or one of his saints, to whom, on our recovery, we make an offering of that hand or foot in wax. Which custom is now come to that extravagance, that we do the same thing for our cattle which we do for ourselves, and make offering for our oxen, horses, sheep : where a scrupulous man will ques-

tion whether in this we imitate the religion or the superstition of our ancestors."

But it is not only in particular rites, but in the whole form of worship, that the resemblance between the idolatry of ancient and modern Rome consists. The dedications on the outside of the popish church are copied from the inscriptions on the heathen temples; in the interior there are the same riches and offerings, there are similar idols, and indeed often the same idols, for the ancient statues were not unfrequently christened, that the Papists might worship them without scruple. And these idols are drest in the same richly-wrought garments as those of the Pagans. In the famed treasury of Loretto, says Middleton, "one part consists, as it did likewise amongst the Heathens, of a wardrobe; for the very idols, as Tertullian observes, used to be drest out in curious robes of the choicest stuffs and fashions. While they were showing us, therefore, the great variety of rich habits with which that treasury abounds, some covered with precious stones, others more curiously embroidered by such a queen or princess, for the use of the miraculous image, I could not help recollecting the picture which old Homer draws of Queen Hecuba of Troy prostrating herself before the miraculous image of Pallas, with a present of the richest and best-wrought gown that she was mistress of:

'A gown she chose, the best and noblest far,
Sparkling with rich embroidery like a star.'

The mention of Loretto puts me in mind of the surprise that I was in at the first sight of the holy image, for its face is as black as a negro's, so that one would take it rather for the representation of a Proserpine or infernal deity, than what they impiously style it, of the queen of heaven. But I soon recollected that this very circumstance of its complexion made it but resemble the more exactly the old idols of Paganism, which are described to be black with the perpetual smoke of lamps and incense. When a man is once engaged in reflections of this kind, imagining himself in some heathen temple, and expecting as it were some sacrifice or other piece of Paganism to ensue, he will not be long in suspense before he sees the finishing act and last scene of genuine idolatry, in crowds of bigot votaries, prostrating themselves before some image of wood or stone, and paying divine honours to an idol of their own erecting. Should they squabble with us here about the meaning of the word idol, St. Jerome has determined it to the very case in question, telling us, that by idols are to be understood the images of the dead. *Idola intelligimus imagines mortuorum*. And the worshippers of such images are used always in the style of the Fathers as synonymous, and equivalent to Heathens or Pagans."

The exact nature of Popery, and whence it derives its origin, seem very clearly pointed out in the above extracts. One more may be added, in relation to the Pope. "In their very priesthood they have con-

trived, one would think, to keep up as near a resemblance as they could to that of pagan Rome. And the sovereign pontiff, instead of deriving his succession from St. Peter, may, with more reason and a much better plea, style himself the successor of the Pontifex Maximus, or chief priest of old Rome, whose authority and dignity was the greatest in the republic, and who was looked upon as the arbiter or judge of all things, civil as well as sacred, human as well as divine; whose power, established almost with the foundation of the city, was an omen, (says Polidore Virgil), and sure presage of that priestly majesty by which Rome was once again to reign as universally as it had done before by the force of its arms. But of all the sovereign pontiffs of pagan Rome, it is very remarkable that Caligula was the first who ever offered his foot to be kissed by any who approached him, which raised a general indignation through the city to see themselves reduced to suffer so great an indignity. Those who endeavoured to excuse it, said that it was not done out of insolence but vanity, and for the sake of showing his golden slipper, set with jewels. Seneca declaims upon it in his usual manner, as the last affront to liberty; and the introduction of a Persian slavery into the manners of Rome. Yet this servile act, unworthy either to be imposed or complied with by man, is now the standing ceremonial of Christian Rome, and a necessary condition of access to the reigning Popes; though

derived from no better origin than the frantic pride of a brutal pagan tyrant."

Not only have the rites and idolatry of Paganism descended to Popery, but even the miracles of the Pagans exist to this day among their popish successors, with scarcely any alteration, but with a considerable increase of celebrity and reputation. The miracle of frankincense melting without fire, which Horace laughs at, is still kept up in the same parts of Italy, in the pretended melting of St. Januarius's blood at Naples, but it is now no jesting matter, and the Roman poet might be thankful that he did not live in the times of the Inquisition.

Notwithstanding the number of miracles pretended to be performed by the Romish priesthood, and notwithstanding the unlimited power of that priesthood, and the submission and credulity of the people, none of these lying wonders are such as to deserve much examination. Middleton, Hume, and others, have in vain searched both the annals of Popery and Paganism, to produce some account of a miracle, that might be compared with those of Christianity. None can bear the simple tests which have been proposed by Leslie and others, that a true miracle must be sensible, public, and commemorated by a contemporaneous record or monument, and that its commemoration should be perpetuated down to the present times. The pretended miracles that Hume has adduced have often been examined, and have

been shown, so far from having anything miraculous, to have scarcely any thing wonderful in them.

Nor was Middleton, who was perhaps better qualified than Hume for these researches, more successful. He had made it his study to discover some instances of miraculous stories which might agree with the four points or tests proposed by Leslie, and boasted that he had discovered several of them, but unfortunately for his assertion, he has produced what he considered as the strongest instance which is here quoted from him. "In the early times of the republic, in the war with the Latins, the gods Castor and Pollux were said to have appeared on white horses in the Roman army, which, by their assistance, gained a complete victory; in memory of which, the general Posthumius vowed and built a temple publicly to these deities; and for a proof of the fact, there was shown, we find in Cicero's time, the mark of the horses' hoofs on a rock at Regillum, where they first appeared. Now, this miracle, with many others that I could mention of the same kind, has, I dare say, as authentic an attestation as any which the Papists can produce: the decree of a senate to confirm it; a temple erected in consequence of it; visible marks of the fact on the spot where it was transacted; and all this supported by the testimony of the best authors of antiquity; amongst whom Dionysius Halicarnassus says, that there were subsisting in his time at Rome many evident proofs of its reality, besides a yearly festival, with a solemn

sacrifice and procession in memory of it. Yet, for all this, these stories were but the jest of men of sense, even in the times of Heathenism; and seem so extravagant to us now, that we wonder how there could ever be any so simple as to believe them." The only thing in the above passage worth remarking upon is, its tacit allusion to the four tests of Leslie, the public fact, the visible marks, and the contemporaneous and permanent commemoration of it. A more silly attempt to discredit Leslie's work can scarcely be conceived. The whole account of the battle of the lake Regillus is a mere fable, supposed by Niebuhr, with considerable probability, to have been derived from an ancient poem. The introduction of Castor and Pollux might be shown to be a subsequent addition to the fable. But supposing the whole account to be true, there is nothing in it that is miraculous, except the change of Domitius' beard from black to red, which Middleton has omitted to mention, although the most important circumstance in the story. All that is asserted is, that two young men, at the head of their cavalry, greatly assisted the Romans during the battle, and afterwards brought the news of the victory to Rome in the evening, and that the Romans conjectured they must be Castor and Pollux. Yet, utterly absurd as this tale is, Middleton had nothing better to produce: to such miserable shifts is infidelity reduced.

If the foolish superstitions of Polytheism plainly show how low the human mind has sunk by Adam's

fall, the idolatry of the church of Rome places this in a still more convincing point of view. We see that the mind of man is continually departing from God, first without a written revelation, and then with the will of God, plainly discovered to him. In the Bible there were the most solemn warnings against any approach to idolatry, and Christians were earnestly and affectionately exhorted to have no participation even in the least degree with the worship of the Pagans. The casting incense upon a Pagan altar without any verbal profession of assent to the creed of the Pagans, would have saved the lives of multitudes of martyrs, but they preferred death to any sacrifice of the truth. Yet such is the deceitfulness of the human heart, that those who call themselves Christians, and who claim an uninterrupted descent from the first martyrs worship those martyrs with the same idolatrous rites, that the martyrs chose rather to lay down their lives than to participate in.

Thus, it is evident, that there is no other permanence in the truth than the being taught by the word and by the Spirit of God. The natural man discerneth not the things of God, neither can know them. While he is professing them with his lips, his heart is far from them. He corrupts the word of God even while he makes it the pretended rule of his life, and the Bible, which he worships with almost idolatrous homage, disregarded in the message which bears it from God to his conscience, only

serves to increase his condemnation. At the last day it will doubtless be more tolerable for the pagan idolaters in India and China than for the self-blinded and Christian idolaters of the mystic Babylon.

VI. Popery contains within it a portion of many ancient heresies, as well as the superstitions of ancient Paganism. Heresies generally arose from preconceived opinions. Where these opinions were strongly marked, the minds infected with them became open and decided opposers of the general belief. Where these opinions were weak, no visible rent was made in the church, but errors circulated with more safety, and often with more success, because concealed. Nor were the heretics without the church equal in numbers to those who were misled by erroneous opinions within. Few think for themselves, or boldly avow their thoughts; but ancient systems of belief were not easily eradicated, and unless carefully watched and checked, will, again and again, spring up like weeds that have attained full possession of the soil. Thus, when the church was opposing the Gnostics and the Manicheans, the same errors, though in a milder form, were spreading throughout the great body of Christians. The essential tenet of the Gnostic philosophy was this, that union with matter is the origin of all evil, and that the only way of escape from evil is for the soul to disengage itself from material pleasures. On this principle is founded the ascetic life which has prevailed so deeply in the corrupted churches of Rome

and of the East. Hence sprung the hermits, and afterwards the monks, who, by the mortification of the body and abstraction from material things, strive, like the Gnostics and the Manicheans, to obtain a higher degree of spiritual purity than can be the lot of those who are living in the world, and immersed in the midst of matter.

We have seen before how the worship of the Virgin Mary connects the Papists of Rome with the Collyridian heretics, and with the still more ancient idolaters of the moon.

The emanative system, which spread so widely over the ancient world, and deduced all being from the one original fountain, is visible both in several of the writings of the Fathers, and also in the pretended explanation of the mystery of the Trinity which the church of Rome authorizes. But it is most conspicuous in the doctrine of Purgatory, which is derived from the same source. Upon this system, all beings are part of the Supreme Being, destined to return like drops into that ocean from which they have been separated for a time, and that return can only be delayed by the stains they contract from the pollution of matter. These stains are worn out by the action of fire, and by the power of pain, till freed from every impurity they joyfully re-ascend to their parent existence. It is impossible to find the doctrine of Purgatory in the Bible, but it is very easy to find it in Virgil's *Eneid*. But while the theory may justly be ascribed to the ancient philosophers and poets.

the church of Rome may be allowed the merit of turning it to profit, for they receive more for their masses offered up in behalf of the souls in Purgatory, during the course of a single century, than Charon did for ferrying souls over Styx during the whole course of Heathenism, though the ancients put a piece of money under the tongue of each of their deceased friends, to pay the price of being wafted over to Elysium.

VII. The absurdities of Popery are impossible to be disguised, though the modern Polytheists have had recourse to the same expedient as the ancient. There is an inner and an outer Popery, as well as an inner and outer Polytheism. As the idolatry of Plato and Socrates was very different from that of the multitude at Athens, so the Popery of Bossuet is very different from the superstition of an Irish peasant, or a Spanish inquisitor. The religion of the church of Rome admits of much latitude; on the one hand, it accords every thing to superstition; practices the most gross and ridiculous are tolerated; on the other hand, it accords much to the new convert who yet struggles against the absurdities of the superstition which he is espousing. Hence the doubtfulness that is attached to all expositions of the Romish faith, when immediately addressed to heretics, where the creed of Rome requires to be softened and placed in its most plausible point of view. Hence Bossuet in his clever exposition, takes as much space and time to declare that "he has not betrayed his conscience, nor disguised the faith of

the church," as to make the doctrines of that church palatable to the reformed. As the little treatise of Bossuet is the most able that has been written on the subject, and as his is the most powerful mind (for the genius of Pascal, though superior in some respects, was debilitated by disease and superstition) that has suffered itself to be hoodwinked by Popery, a few extracts shall be given from it which sufficiently condemn vulgar Popery, at the same time that they plainly show the hollowness of the more refined system which Bossuet himself porposes.

The simplest view of reason shows that a creature can merit nothing ; when it has done all, it must stand before the Creator as an unprofitable servant ; when it has given all, it must add with David "Thine own have we given thee." The simplest view of revelation teaches us, that man, as a fallen creature, has nothing of his own but sin, and that he can only approach the divine purity invested with the righteousness of the Saviour, and accepted in the sight of God on account of that beloved Son in whom he is ever well pleased. Simple as these views are, they are sufficient to overturn the whole of Popery. The Papists justly considering themselves as sinners, but neglecting the merits of Christ, look to other sinners to present their requests before the throne of God, and esteeming the souls of the martyrs to be the favourites of God, have recourse to their intercession instead of that of the Saviour. "Parce que les saints lui sont plus agréables que

nous, nous leur demandons qu'ils prennent notre défense et qu'ils obtiennent pour nous les choses dont nous avons besoin. Delà vient que nous usons de deux formes de prières fort différentes ; puis qu'au lieu qu'en parlant à Dieu la maniere propre est de dire, ayez pitié de nous, écoutez nous, nous nous contentons de dire aux saints priez pour nous."* But if the reason that the saints are favourites with God is the inducement for the Papists to offer up their prayers through them, why is not Christ, being always the well-beloved of the Father, a sufficient argument to them that they need no other intercessor but him? Is he less willing or less able to save than the saints? Nothing but the deepest ignorance of the infinite love and infinite power of the Saviour could for a moment permit the impiety of invoking any other intercession but his. But the praying to the saints supposes them invested with divine attributes, that they are present with their worshippers in all places and ages, and this deification of them is so evident a consequence of addressing them in prayer, that Bossuet himself admits it. and with unparalleled hardihood denies that any Catholic ever supposed that the saints ever heard any of those prayers that are continually addressed to them by the Papists, but that even the most illiterate

* Because the saints are more acceptable to Him than we are, we ask them to undertake our defence, and obtain for us the things we need. We use therefore two very different forms of prayers: for, in speaking to God, we say, "have mercy on us," "hear us;" to the saints we only say, "pray for us."

Romanists believe that it is by an immediate revelation from God, or, at least, by the ministry of the angels, that the saints in heaven learn the prayers which are addressed to them upon earth. "Au reste, jamais aucun Catholique n'a pensé que les saints connussent par eux-mêmes nos besoins, ni même les desirs pour lesquels nous leur faisons de secrettes prieres. L'église se contente d'enseigner avec toute l'antiquité, que ces prieres sont très-profitables à ceux qui les font, soit que les saints les apprennent par le ministere et le commerce des anges, qui suivant le temoignage de l'Ecriture sçavent ce qui se passe parmi nous, étant établis par ordre de Dieu esprits administrateurs, pour concourir à l'œuvre de notre Salut ; soit que Dieu-même leur fasse connoître nos desirs par une revelation particuliere ; soit enfin qu'il leur en decouvre le secret dans son essence infinie où toute vérité est comprise. Ainsi l'église n'a rien décidé sur les différens moyens dont il plait à Dieu de se servir pour cela."*

* Never has any Catholic supposed that the saints know of themselves our necessities, or even the desires on account of which we offer to them secret prayers! The church is content to teach, with all antiquity, that these prayers are very profitable to those who offer them; whether the saints become acquainted with them through the ministry and intervention of the angels, who, according to the testimony of scripture, know whatever occurs among us, being constituted by the order of God's ministering spirits to assist in the work of our salvation; or whether God himself makes known to them our desires by a special revelation; or whether finally he discloses to them the secret in his own infinite essence, in which every truth is comprised. Thus the church has decided nothing as to the different means which God pleases to use for this purpose.

To such an excess of absurdity is this acute advocate of Popery, notwithstanding all his shifts, reduced, that, according to him, the sinner, judging himself not sufficiently "agréable" to God to present his request immediately to Him, makes a pretence of addressing them to the saints, though he well knows that the saints cannot hear him, that it is God alone who is listening to him, and who, by an immediate "revelation," or by the ministry of an "angel," must first make known these prayers to the saints, in order that He may receive these petitions again presented to Him, in a more agreeable and round-about way. But it is equally evident that the Romanists, when they pray, have no such miserable subterfuges, but address the saints in the full belief that they are continually present, and ever listening to their petitions, so that, by the admission of Bossuet the Papists are gross idolaters, and he only can escape from idolatry himself by a most incredible absurdity.

The idolatrous worship of the saints is rendered still more conspicuous by the veneration which is paid to their images. Here also we have another sample of a difference between inner and outer Popery. "Pour les images le Concile de Trente défend expressément de croire aucune Divinité ou vertu pour laquelle on les doive révéler ; de leur demander aucun grace et d'y attacher sa confiance et veut que tout l'honneur se rapporte aux originaux

qu'elles representent.”* Now, the whole superstition of Catholic countries is directly in opposition to those injunctions of the council. It is the images fully as much as the originals, which they represent, that are worshipped. This is evident from a glance into any Romish cathedral, and is made abundantly manifest by the way in which the images are worshipped, and the manner in which they are spoken of. If it was the Virgin, and not her images, that was worshipped, it would matter little which of these images were resorted to, but some of these images are much more highly esteemed than others. Hence, it is the particular image which is attended to, preferred, and distinguished, not the Virgin herself, who must be considered as ever the same. That a virtue resides in these images, is believed, in spite of the Council of Trent, and the miraculous stories that are told of these images are a sufficient proof of this, if any proof were necessary. It is also sufficiently evident, whatever the theorists of Popery may say to the contrary, that favours are asked of these images, and that the Papists place their trust in them, and honour some more, some less, without any exact reference to the dignity of the original which they represent. “Toutes ces paroles du concile sont autant de caractères qui

* As to images, the Council of Trent expressly prohibits the belief of any divinity or efficiency, on account of which we ought to reverence them, ask of them any favour, or place in them any confidence; and determines, that all the honour be referred to the originals whom they represent.

servent à nous faire distinguer des idolâtres.”* Thus, by Bossuet’s principles, the majority of the Roman Catholics are idolaters, since they observe none of those fundamental distinctions upon which he, and the Council of Trent, insist.

It would be long and unprofitable to follow Bossuet in his vain attempts to disguise the absurdities of Popery, in his admission that Christ has made full satisfaction to the Father for the sins of his people, and that all sins are freely forgiven at baptism, but not so freely after baptism, Christ being, by Bossuet’s account, “forced in a certain manner,” by the ingratitude of those who have abused his first gifts, to take a somewhat different method, and to commute eternal into temporal punishments, which temporal punishments the church again has the power of commuting into still shorter punishments, and of abbreviating their term in another life, by money and masses properly applied to that purpose.

It is a more melancholy spectacle, when rightly viewed, to behold an enlarged understanding thus sold to the service of error, endeavouring to palliate manifest absurdity, and to withdraw men from the only name under heaven, by which they can be saved, in order to win them over to a monstrous superstition, than it would be to contemplate the ravages of madness on the most exalted genius.

* All these words of this Council are so many marks serving to distinguish us from idolaters.

The exposition of Bossuet cannot be considered as an adequate representation of the Romish church ; it is as far removed from Popery on one side, as it is from truth on the other. The religion, which it sets forth, consists of a number of subtle distinctions much too delicate to be observed in practice. It would be easier to pass over the bridge of the Mahometans, as narrow and sharp as the edge of a scimeter, in the passage to the other world, than to go to heaven in the successful observance of Bossuet's metaphysical niceties, if these were to be the price of paradise. Constantly to pray to the saints, with the perpetual conviction that they do not hear us by their own unaided powers, and to pray in the presence of images with the imagination excited by them, and yet with the firm belief that no virtue resides in them, were a superstition too complicated and contradictory for the inventor of it himself to practise and observe.

We see a much simpler and more honest representation of Popery than any that Bossuet or the doctors of the church afford, in the conduct of the Portuguese, when they first arrived in India. In their devout and unsophisticated minds, Popery and Paganism were completely identified. The continual shouts of Crishnu, Crishnu, they confidently mistook for the invocation of Christ ; the idol temples appeared to them Romish cathedrals, and the Brahmins, Popish priests. " From this place the Kutwal carried the general to one of their pagodas or idol temples, into which they entered and with the

Kutwal said was a church of great holiness. 'This the general believed to be the case, fancying it to be a church of the Christians, which he the more readily believed, as he saw seven little bells hang over the principal door. In front of this entry there stood a pillar made of wire, as tall as the mast of a ship, on the top of which was a weathercock, likewise made of wire. This church was as large as a moderate convent, all built of free stone, and covered or vaulted over with brick, having a fine outward appearance, as if its inside were of splendid workmanship. Our general was much pleased with this church, as he actually believed himself in a Christian country, and gladly entered along with the Kutwal. They were received by the priests, who were naked from their waists upwards, having a kind of petticoats of cotton hanging down from the girdle to their knees, and pieces of calico covering their arm pits; their heads, legs, and feet bare. They were distinguished by wearing certain threads over their right shoulders, which crossed over their breasts and under their left arms, much in the way in which our priests used formerly to wear their stoles when they said mass. These men are called Kafirs, and are idolaters, serving as priests in the pagodas of Malabar; and on the general going into the pagoda, they took holy water with a sprinkle from a font, threw it over the Kutwal and him, and their attendants. After this they gave them powdered sandalwood to throw upon their heads, as used to be done amongst us with ashes:

and they were directed to do the same on their arms. But our people, as being clothed, omitted this latter part of the ceremony, complying with the other. In this pagoda they saw many images painted on the walls, some of which had monstrous teeth, projecting an inch from their mouths, and some had four arms ; all of them so ugly that they seemed like devils, which raised doubts amongst our people whether they were actually in a Christian church. In the middle of the pagoda stood a chapel having a roof or dome of free stone like a tower, in one part of which was a door of wire, to which there led a flight of stone steps. On the inside of this tower an image was observed in a recess of the wall, which our men could not see distinctly, as the place was somewhat dark, and they were not permitted to go near, as none were allowed to approach except the priests. But, from certain words and signs, our people understood this to be an image of the virgin ; on which the general and his attendants went upon their knees to say their prayers. John de Sala, however, being very doubtful that this was not a Christian church, owing to the monstrous images on the wall, said as he fell on his knees, 'If this be the devil, I worship God'—on which the general looked at him with a smile."

VIII. In the history of the world nothing is more wonderful than the change of Christianity into Popery. Nothing can be more dissimilar to the mild religion of heaven, than the intolerant and absurd superstition which has assumed the name and place of Chris-

Christianity in countries where true religion once flourished. Each departure from the truth was gradual ; those who were removing from the doctrines of the Bible and adhering to the traditions of men, had little conception how far the stream of corruption to which they were yielding would at length carry them away.

No doubt, the doctrines of Christianity are retained by the Romish church, as the Bible itself is retained, but both are considered too spiritual and elevated for daily and general use, and the saints take the place of the Saviour, and vain legends usurp the authority of the Scriptures, and idolatrous and absurd sacrifices conceal from the view the one great sacrifice which has abolished sin and death to all believers. Of all the artifices of the Father of Lies for the destruction of the human race, Popery is the most dangerous and successful, which effectually destroys the essence of Christianity, while it preserves the name, and deludes its votaries with a pretence of trusting in the Saviour, while it is causing them to bow down to dumb idols which can neither profit nor save.

Popery is Paganism under a thin disguise of Christianity, and, accordingly, in all things it is but a gross and material counterfeit of true and spiritual religion. The church of Christ is ever one and the same, and Popery aims at the same identity and universality ; but, instead of the true church, which is a spiritual body with Christ for its head, Popery is but a putrifying and noisome carcass—a collection of unregenerate men, the doers of every evil work, with

those who love and those who make a lie, with the Pope, not the Saviour, for their head. Whosoever believes in the Saviour is infallible in the best sense ; all things are working together for good to him ; he shall be led by the Spirit, in due time, into all useful truth, and delivered from every hurtful error. Popery has its infallibility, but this infallibility consists in being infallibly wrong ; even when convinced of its errors it cannot change them ; having made a wrong step it cannot recede. Thus, while religion is the guidance of the believer unto all truth, Popery, by its assumption of infallibility, is the leader of the credulous into inextricable error.

IX. The enmity which God has placed between the seed of the woman and the serpent never ceases. Those who outwardly acknowledge a revelation from God, do not the less hate and persecute those who receive the divine word inwardly and in reality. The Jews, while they made their boast of being depositaries of God's messages of mercy to mankind, yet slew and evil-entreated the messengers who brought them, and while their minds were filled with expectations of the arrival of the great King, of whom all the prophets had spoken, they betrayed that King to the Gentiles, and nailed him to the cross.

It was certainly not to be expected that the mere acknowledging Christianity to be from God, and the assumption of the Christian name, should of itself put an end to persecution. Those who are

after the flesh, will ever hate those who are after the Spirit, and will never cease to inflict injuries upon them, when not restrained by the prevalence of better principles, or at least by the coercion of the laws, or by the check of public opinion.

But though it could not be expected that persecution should cease, yet it could never have been imagined that persecution should have been augmented, instead of being diminished, when Paganism ceased, and that Christians should suffer more from bishops and sovereigns who professed Christianity, than they had ever done from the Pagan priesthood and the Pagan emperors of Rome.

Yet the persecutions of Pagan Rome are not to be compared to those of Papal Rome, either in frequency, in duration, in cruelty, or in success. When the Christians were punished by the Roman magistrates, it was generally on the information of voluntary informers. The Papists do not trust to this alone, but have established a system of permanent and salaried accusation against all real Christians, by the appointment of a regular inquisition. The furnace of persecution was only occasionally heated by the Pagans, but by the Papists it is kept continually and intensely burning. A general persecution was only resorted to by the Pagans at particular times : with the Papists there are no seasons of relaxation or intermission ; and not only those who oppose the church of Rome are persecuted, but even those who are merely suspected of differing from it

All might re-enter the Pagan church by a single act of conformity, in casting incense upon the flames ; but the idols of modern Rome are not so placable ; suspicion is almost equivalent to guilt, and can scarcely ever be entirely wiped away.

None can seriously read any of the mutilated portions of history relating to that mystery of iniquity, the inquisition, without being struck with the commentary which it affords to the scriptural expression of Satan being termed the god of this world. In the inquisition we see an order of proceeding at war with the good government of the world, and emanating directly from the source of evil. Every natural feeling is violated, every principle of justice reversed. The divine attributes of mercy and justice are trampled under foot. Fiend-like cunning, falsehood, and insatiable malice, triumph and prevail ; and the earth, where the inquisition has fixed its seat, seems changed into the vestibule of hell.

X. Great light would be thrown upon Popery by a well-written history of the lives of the Popes. "Take care what you are about," said one cardinal to another, when proceeding to vote, "you are going to give a sort of god to the earth." But, notwithstanding this caution, and the strong reasons for it, the cardinals have not been nice in their choice of successors to St. Peter ; and it affords a curious picture of human nature in the variety of situations in which it may be placed, to see some

times an almost idiot exalted to the chair of infallibility,—an infidel breathing out flames and slaughter against every departure from the incredible dogmas of Popery,—a libertine doing penance for his former debauchery, by being placed at the head of the Romish church,—or a chief of banditti wielding the two swords of St. Peter, while he maintains the tone of paternal affection and benediction, and is ever speaking in the language of the Prince of Peace.

Great elevation appears to affect weak minds with a species of madness; they find themselves placed at a height which they cannot retain, and from which they cannot descend. The tyrannic emperors of Rome were many of them in their disposition rather feeble than cruel; the beginning of their reigns was often mild and modest; they felt that their powers were unsuitable to the situation they occupied; and the diffidence which began by courting public approbation, ended in fear and exasperation against the real or supposed dangers that surrounded them. We see a degree of frenzy, mixed with cruelty, taking possession of their mind; and when they had once tasted of blood, there was no hope of their being reclaimed.

The Popes are not placed in equally trying situations with their predecessors the emperors of Rome; still their elevation is too great for their limited faculties meekly to bear, and we may trace occasionally in their conduct similar symptoms of an aberration

of mind. During their more prosperous days they gave no slight indications of the insanity of power. As their public conduct was the reverse of what might be expected from those who profess to imitate the Saviour and his apostles, and who claim to be the vicegerents of the Deity, for maintaining the reign of peace and righteousness upon earth, so when the curtain is sometimes raised from their private and more obscure actions, we see their lives, not only far below the purity which the gospel requires from all its followers, but sometimes stained with vices too gross to be named.

We have elsewhere mentioned that a moral picture of the world would be a useful though a very difficult work. A picture of Popery considered alone, would be less arduous, and yet nearly as instructive. It would afford an awful but salutary view of the deep degradation of our nature; of how difficult it is to the mind of man to retain its hold of truth, and with what ease it imbibes the most absurd and monstrous opinions. It is a work which might possess great variety in delineating the characters of the Popes and other leaders of the Romish superstition. It might give free scope to reason in the detection of sophistry, and afford legitimate employment to ridicule in the exposing convicted absurdities. It is a work which, in the hand of a master, might engage every power, and rouse every feeling of the mind, exciting, in the language of Burke, "alternate scorn and horror, alternate laughter and tears."

XI. Unless we take the aid and sanction of the language of Scripture, it is difficult to characterize Popery without apparent harshness to individuals, who, though members of a corrupt church, yet, we may hope, possess much of the spirit of true religion. But whatever is said against the Romish superstition, applies to the system, not to the persons who uphold it, with various degrees of error and of guilt. It is impossible to class Pascal and Fenelon along with an infidel Italian cardinal, or Spanish inquisitor; not that on that account these eminent and pious men are free from condemnation; they studied the Scriptures, and the sacred writings called upon them, as upon all others, to come out from Babylon, and to be separate from her abominations. A voluntary and unscriptural humility, with a blind submission to the dictates of him who had seated himself in the temple of God, as if he were God, may naturally lead us to pity them, but by no means to excuse them; their example has done much harm, and been only the more pernicious from their eminence and their virtues. It is difficult to calculate how much assistance their well-merited reputation has given to prop the falling cause of Popery, and to lengthen out the continuance of the delusion, the most dangerous that has ever led mankind astray from the truth.

Whatever terms of commendation we use with respect to Popery, we should still come short of the energy of the language of the Scripture. Popery

is there spoken of as the great apostacy of the latter days, the revelation of the Man of Sin, the grand device of Satan for opposing the cause of the Saviour, and for persecuting and wearing out the saints of the Most High. The apostacy of the Papists from the truth as it is in Jesus, is so clearly revealed beforehand in the Scriptures, that the great Dr. Clarke would have had no hesitation in resting the proof of Christianity on the fulfilment of these predictions in the corruptions of the Romish church. During the prophetical period of twelve hundred and sixty years, "when Daniel, I say, foretels such a tyrannical power to continue such a determined period of time ; and St. John prophesies that the Gentiles should tread the holy city under foot forty and two months ; which is exactly the same period of time as that of Daniel ; and again, that two witnesses, clothed in sackcloth, should prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days ; which is again exactly the very same period of time : and again, that the woman which fled into the wilderness from persecution, should continue there a thousand two hundred and threescore days : and again, that she should fly into the wilderness for a time and times and half a time ; which is still the very same period : and again, that a wild beast, a tyrannical power, to whom it was given to make war with the saints, and to overcome them, was to continue forty and two months, still the very same period of time, and to have power over all kindreds, tongues, and nations, so that all that dwell

upon the earth should worship him. Is it credible or possible that ignorant and enthusiastical writers should by mere chance hit upon such coincidences of occult numbers? especially as St. John could not possibly take the numbers from Daniel, if he understood Daniel to mean nothing more than the short persecution of Antiochus. And if he did understand Daniel to mean a much longer, and greater, and more remote tyranny, which John himself prophesied of as in his time still future: then the wonder is still infinitely greater, that in those early times, when there was not the least footstep in the world of any such power as St. John distinctly describes, (but which now is very conspicuous, as I shall presently observe more particularly), it should ever enter the heart of man to conceive so much of the possibility of such a power sitting, not upon the pavilion of heathen persecutors, but expressly in the temple and upon the seat of God himself." After this, Clarke goes on more particularly to enumerate the prophecies relating to the popish apostacy, and their fulfilment, and draws from the whole a proof for the truth of Christianity with a force and distinctness which has been generally acknowledged. His remarks, with some omissions, on account of the length of the passage, are as follows:—"Daniel foretells a kingdom upon the earth, which shall be divers from all kingdoms, divers from all that were before it, exceeding dreadful, and shall devour the whole earth. That among the powers into which this kingdom shall be divided,

there shall arise one power divers from the rest, who shall subdue unto himself three of the first powers, and he shall have a mouth speaking very great things, and a look more stout than his fellows. He shall make war with the saints, and prevail against them. And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand for a long season; even till the judgment shall sit, and the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. He shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every God, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, &c., &c. Suppose all this now to be spoken by Daniel of nothing more than the short persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, which, that it cannot be, I have shown above; but suppose it were, and that it was all forged after the event, yet it cannot be the case of St. Paul and St. John, who describe exactly a like power, and in like words; speaking of things to come in the latter days, of things still future in their time, and of which there was then no footsteps, no appearance in the world. The day of Christ, says St. Paul, shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that Man of Sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God:—whose coming is

after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness." Again: "The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, (that is, for so it should be translated, doctrines concerning demons or souls of men departed;) forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, &c. St. John, in like manner, prophesies of a wild beast or tyrannical power, to whom was given great authority, and a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies: and he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him to overcome all kindreds, and tongues, and nations; and all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him. And he that exerciseth his power before him—doth great wonders—and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he hath power to do. And he causeth that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark or the name of the beast. And the kings of the earth have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast; for God hath put into their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree and give their kindgdoms to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. The name of the person in whose hands the reins or principal direction of the exercise of this power is lodged, is Mystery, Babylon the Great. She is

drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus : and by her sorceries are all nations deceived : and in her is found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that are slain upon the earth. And this person (the political person) to whom these titles and characters belong, is that great city, standing upon seven mountains, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”

“If, in the days of St. Paul and St. John, there was any footstep of any such a sort of power as this in the world ; or if there ever had been any such power in the world ; or if there was then any appearance of probability that could make it enter into the heart of man to imagine that there ever could be any such kind of power in the world, much less in the temple or church of God ; and if there be not now such a power actually and conspicuously exercised in the world ; and if any picture of this power, drawn after the event, can now describe it more plainly and exactly than it was originally described in the words of the prophecy ; then may it with some degree of plausibleness be suggested, that the prophecies are nothing more than enthusiastic imaginations.”

Thus Clarke has united in a short compass a demonstration of the truth of Christianity with a demonstration of the falsehood and impiety of Popery. And new and similar proofs are afforded by all the prophecies which concern the latter days. In all these prophecies we see the character of Popery

distinctly marked: the prosperity of the false church which sat as a queen, reigning in all outward splendour, while the true church had fled to the wilderness. We see also the many nations and kings which submitted to its usurped and blasphemous authority, even peoples, and nations, and multitudes, and tongues. We see also the boasted unity of the false church, and the means by which that unity is maintained; the kings of the earth being of one mind, and giving their strength and their power unto the beast. The pretensions of the Papists to false miracles, are distinctly marked in the coming of the Man of Sin, after the working of Satan with all miracles and lying wonders. The Gnostic and Manichean perfection which the monks aspire after, is likewise clearly predicted, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats. The doctrines concerning demons, or the worship of the spirits of dead men eminent for their virtue, as Hesiod so clearly describes, and believed to be appointed on that account by the ruler of the world, to fill the station of mediators, and subordinate governors under him—those doctrines concerning demons which so manifestly identify Paganism and Popery, are decidedly foretold also, incredible as it must at that time have seemed, that those who professed Christianity should so far relapse into the grossest heathen errors.

But there is one mark that the Papists think it impossible can be applied to the Pope, that he as

God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Since whatever authority the Pope exercises, he professes to derive from God, they consider the charge to be ridiculous of his usurping the divine authority or setting himself in the place of God. Notwithstanding this attempt at exculpation, the titles which the Pope has assumed are sufficient to bring home the charge of blasphemy against the ruler of the Romish church. But without referring to these, which have often been insisted on, it is sufficient to remark, that the temple of God confines the Man of Sin within the pale of the professed Christian church; that none within that church, by the Pope's own showing, claims the authority that he does, and therefore the description must apply to him or to no one else. God rules in his church by his word; he who sets aside that word, sets aside the authority of God; he who claims infallibility, assumes the authority which belongs only to God, and sitting in the temple of God, and promulgating his decrees as the head of the Christian church, and commanding men to obey him rather than God and God's word, he shows himself that he is God, and demands an idolatrous submission to his authority, still more than if he set up his own image, and commanded all peoples, and nations, and tongues, literally to fall down before it and worship it.

XII. With a deep sense of the weakness of the human understanding, we may still wonder how such a system of absurdities could ever have pre-

vailed, after the Sun of Righteousness had arisen upon the world, and dispelled, in some degree, the darkness of Paganism. A new wonder is, that it should still continue so long to enthrall the mind of its votaries, and to survive the wreck of other heresies, which, though more plausible in themselves, have yet had a much briefer existence. The prevalence and continuance of Popery, however, teaches us a deep moral lesson; it casts a stain upon the pride of human nature which can never be effaced. What must the understanding of man be, when not aided from above, seeing how readily it believes, and how obstinately it defends contradictions so palpable in themselves.

Deep however as Popery has struck its roots throughout the south of Europe, and though it has been deprived of its branches alone by the storms which have assailed it, while the trunk has remained immoveably firm, still there are visible upon it the increasing marks of decay. It has its season of revival and promise, but it never repairs by its after growth the losses which it has undergone. It has not only less vitality within itself, but its roots are continually undermined, and its bulk and solidity, which have resisted former attacks, will only help to bring it to the ground at last with a more ponderous ruin.

Infidelity, which, while it was rare and confined to the rich, Popery sometimes encouraged, thinking it safer that men who were disposed to investigate

and reason, should rather doubt the truth of Christianity altogether, than question the claims of the church of Rome in particular ; now that it has become so general amongst all ranks of men on the Continent, fills the mind of the Romish priesthood with serious and merited alarm. Not that infidelity prefers any other form of superstition to that of Rome ; but Popery has so entwined itself with whatever is established, that it is necessarily at open war with every species of innovation, whether political or religious. It is too much indebted to ignorance, even in sincerity, to be the friend of true knowledge. Popery, according to the prophecy of Wolsey, must destroy the press, or be destroyed by it. If all things could remain as they are, Popery might yet hope to survive for many ages, though stripped in some degree of its splendour, and curtailed in its power. But all things are changing, and its days are numbered. The Son of Man is approaching with the brightness of his coming. The angels of vengeance are ready for their work. The fuel which will burn for ever is heaped up, the breath of the Lord has but to kindle it, and the modern Babylon shall become, like the ancient—a desolation, a hissing, and an astonishment for ever.

PART FOURTH

MYSTICISM.

- I. As Popery proceeds from Polytheism, so Mysticism from Pantheism.
- II. Mysticism flourishing in the East.
- III. Mysticism less prevalent in the West.
- IV. Pantheistic Mysticism.
- V. Emanative Mysticism.
- VI. Devotional Mysticism.
- VII. Mysticism now rather practical than speculative.
- VIII. Mysticism natural to the Mind.
- IX. Its near resemblance to Truth, and its essential difference.
- X. Mysticism first favourable to the reformation of Religion, then adverse.

PART IV.

MYSTICISM.

I. As the Polytheism of the ancient popular superstition put on a Christian disguise and became Popery, so it was natural to expect that the Pantheism of the heathen philosophers should equally survive and reappear under a new name, and with a somewhat different aspect. It had so long and so deeply infected the speculative theories of all the ancient nations, that it was impossible it could be at once eradicated. The system of the one universal Being, as the very ground work of Gentile wisdom, met the view of the earlier Christians to whatever sect they might turn, either for arguments or disciples. They who became converts to Christianity, after they had been imbued with Gentile literature, brought these notions along with them, and beheld Christianity in part through the medium of their former creed. The very terms used in religion being common to their present and their previous belief, blended together in their minds Jehovah, the true and self-existing God, with the universal Pan, the imaginary

deity of the wise and the enlightened in countries destitute of revelation. Thus while the superstition of the vulgar replaced and reconsecrated the statues and the images of Heathenism, the enthusiasm of philosophy, falsely so called, again, and without laying aside the Christian name, dreamt of freeing itself from the chains of matter, of discovering the Deity by an internal sense, and of rejoining the divine essence from which it sprung, by withdrawing itself from whatever was sensible or corporeal. This philosophy, which prevailed first among the Gnostics, and afterwards among the Manicheans, appears more covertly in the writings of several of the earlier fathers and shows itself at last without a veil in the verses of Synesius, and in the writings of Dionysius, the pretended Areopagite.

II. The east has always been the country where devotional Pantheism has most flourished; in the west it has rather been introduced as an exotic, and its growth has been always tamer and less luxuriant. But in the east the whole of philosophy, of religion and life, have received the deep strain of its colour.

A fragment of the Chaldean philosophy, perhaps one of the most ancient remnants of early speculation that exists, contains these doctrines in their germ. These tenets were more clearly developed in the ancient system of the Persians, and in the sect of the ancient Hushangis, who have reappeared in the modern Sufis. But, above all, they have reached

their utmost height in the Vedas and other sacred writings of the Hindoos.

In the Indian philosophy, the universal Being or Brahm is represented either in a state of repose or of action. Repose is the original and unmodified state of the Deity, resembling the first cause of Jacob Behmen, which is termed the infinite nothing, where the Godhead is actually nothing, but potentially all things. The Hindoos in this state consider Brahm or the universe as divested even of all intelligence, utterly devoid of any thought, or of any attribute, resting in a quietude so deep as to be inconceivable, but which they endeavour to illustrate by comparing it to an ocean without waves, or to a sleep without dreams.

But Brahm in action assumes his energy, flows out into creation, and becomes, according to the present system, Brahma, Vishnoo and Seva, the creating, preserving, and destroying powers. Professor Murray, without mentioning upon what authority he proceeds, or whether merely upon an ingenious and probable conjecture, distinguishes the original Triad of the Hindoos from all subsequent ones. Speaking of the supreme Triad of the Hindoos, he says—“These three are Brahm, the separate incommunicable high Parent of all; Brama the Dewtah or object of worship and actual governor of the universe; and the Perm-atma, or universal spirit, flowing through them.” Brahm becomes the whole creation. According to the Vedantu doctrine, “all

things past, present, and to come ; all that is in the earth, sky, &c., of every class and description ; all this is Brahm, who is the cause of all things, and the things themselves." "The soul," as Ward observes, "by these writers is considered as separated from the source of happiness when it takes mortal birth, and as remaining a miserable wanderer in various births and states till it regain its place in the divine essence. A devotee sighing for absorption is described as uttering his feelings in words to this purpose. When shall I be delivered from this world and obtain God?" Crishnu is represented as teaching that the learned "behold Brahm alike in the reverend Bramin perfected in knowledge, in the ox, and in the elephant, in dogs, and in him who eateth of the flesh of dogs," and it is added, those whose minds are fixed on this equality gain eternity even in this world. Thus the Hindoo sage, by meditating on the identity of all things with the self-existent, and by performing the no less earnestly enjoined duties of stopping his breathing, and fixing his intent gaze upon the tip of his nose is freed from the evils of finite existence, and absorbed into the divine essence.

Very similar is the creed of the modern Sufis, who, indeed, consider the sages of India as their brethren. These, as Sir William Jones observes, "who profess a belief in the Koran, suppose with great sublimity, both of the thought and diction, an *express contract on the day of eternity without beginning*

between the assemblage of created spirits, and the supreme soul from which they were detached, when a celestial voice pronounced these words, addressed to each spirit separately, Art thou not with thy Lord? that is, art thou not bound by a solemn contract with him? and all the spirits answered with one voice, Yes. Hence it is, that *Alist*, or art thou not, and *Beli*, or Yes, incessantly occur in the mystical verses of the Persians, and of the Turkish poets who imitate them, as the Romans imitated the Greeks. The Hindoos described the same covenant under the figurative notion, so finely expressed by Isaiah, of a nuptial contract; for reconsidering God in the three characters of Creator, Regenerator, and Preserver, and supposing the power of preservation and benevolence to have become incarnate in the person of Crishnu, they represent him as married to Radha, a word signifying atonement, pacification, or satisfaction, but applied allegorically to the soul of man, or rather to the whole assemblage of created souls."

The above passage is quoted, less as being a correct representation of the notions of the Hindoos. (for it is evidently a little accommodated to our own opinions,) than as being in striking accordance with the spirit of Mysticism, which, in the most remote and diverse creeds, seeks and finds a reflection of its own sentiments. The mixture of a mystical sense with passages and verses which treat of profane subjects, gives one great peculiarity to the poetry of the

east. Several instances of these Sir William Jones gives from the Odes of Hafiz. "In eternity without beginning, a ray of thy beauty began to gleam, when love sprang into being, and cast flames over all nature; on that day thy cheeks sparkled even under thy veil, and all this beautiful imagery appeared on the mirror of our fancies." "From the moment when I heard the divine sentence, *I have breathed into man a portion of my spirit*, I was assured that we were His and He ours."

The Sufis, according to Sir John Malcolm, maintain doctrines similar to the Bramins with respect to matter. "They term the world a world of delusion, by which it is implied that we are constantly with regard to all Maddah or matter, under an illusion of our senses, and that it exists only from the light of God, or the animating principle which enables us to see it, and makes it visible, otherwise it is in itself nothing. The creation, they say, proceeded at once from the splendour of God, who poured his spirit on the universe, as the general diffusion of light is poured over the earth by the rays of the sun; and as the absence of that luminary creates total darkness, so the partial or the total absence of the divine splendour or light causes partial or general annihilation." The tenets of the Sufis are also beautifully expressed in some lines translated by Sir William Jones from the Mollah of Roum, in "his astonishing work, entitled the *Masnavi*."

Hear how yon reed in sadly pleasing tales
 Departed bliss and present woe bewails;
 Oh let the heart by fatal absence rent,
 Feel what I sing, and bleed while I lament,
 Who roams in exile from his parent bower,
 Pants to return and chides each ling'ring hour
 My notes, in circles of the grave and gay,
 Have hailed the rising, cheered the closing day
 Each in my fond affections claimed a part,
 But none discerned the secret of my heart.

Alternate hope and fear my days divide,
 I courted grief, and anguish was my bride.
 Flow on, sad stream of life, I smile secure,
 Thou livest, thou, the purest of the pure.

Hail heavenly love, true source of endless gains
 Thy balm restores me, and thy skill sustains.
 Oh, more than Galen learned, than Plato wise,
 My guide, my law, my joy supreme, arise.

Blest is the soul that swims in seas of love,
 And long the life sustained by food above
 With forms imperfect can perfection dwell?
 Here pause my song: and thou, vain world, farewell.

III. The west has always been more remarkable for reasoning and action than for that monotonous contemplation from which the Mysticism of the east derives its prevalence. The indolence which the climate of India and parts of Persia inspires, and the leisure afforded by a large caste set apart for the priesthood, are very favourable for that contemplative turn of mind which nearly borders upon insanity, which is more affected by the imagery which is floating before its fancy, than by the objects which surround it; which mistakes its own dreams for

realities, and reality for a dream. In the small and vigorous states of ancient Europe, every thing was too full of life, and danger, and action, to suffer the reveries of imagination to obtain an equal hold upon the mind. Pythagoras and Plato, indeed, introduced many tenets from the east into their philosophy, but these tenets are greatly mitigated in order to suit the different genius of the west, and the philosophers of Greece, though they frequently withdrew themselves from the turmoil of their native republics, still preserved the vigorous tone of mind which was common amongst the Greeks, and which they derived in no small degree from their political convulsions and struggles.

As the Mysticism of Pythagoras is tame and sober when compared with the Vedanta philosophy of India, so the Christian Mystics of Europe present but a feeble copy of the ardent devotion which had its original in the east. It was kept alive, however, by the monastic life which, like the mystic doctrines, is derived from more burning climates and a more relaxed frame of mind. In the solitude and monotony of the monastery, a similar turn of thought, and the same high-wrought and mystical devotion was attempted to be perpetuated as that which had actuated the solitaries of the Egyptian or Syrian wilderness. And a succession of mystical writers, from Scotus Erigena downwards, through the dark ages, could trace their descent to Dionysius the Areopagite, and the introduction of his writings from the

cast. Scotus most plainly asserts that all things are God and God is all things, and that as all has proceeded from God, so all, when every impurity is purged away, will return to him again.

IV. We have before remarked, that Pantheism, or the belief of one only Being, admits of two modifications,—strict Pantheism, which considers the belief of finite existence as a mere illusion, and admits of no possible change in the infinite and absolute Being ; and the emanative system, which allows of changes and modifications in the divine substance. Strict Pantheism is the least common, but it is found in several sects of the Hindoos, and has also left traces behind it in fragments of Greek philosophy. In their system, the soul being already identified with God, nothing else is required than to keep it free from *Maya*, or that delusion by which it imagines itself to be distinct from the Deity ; or rather from the error which arises from the notion of *self*, or *I*, which is to be entirely eradicated from the mind. Such a system could only subsist, even for a moment, by the annihilation of consciousness. Consistency is not here to be expected, and this is rather to be looked on as the extreme point to which Pantheism tends, than as a regular and connected system which can be steadfastly maintained. Even the doctrine of absorption into the divine Being, which may either be regarded as deification or annihilation, is too strong a tenet to be relished by many devotees, who pray that they may not obtain the

highest honour of absorption, but may be allowed to retain a consciousness of their own separate existence after death.

V. Of all systems, the emanative is that which has been most widely diffused. It spread over the philosophy of Greece, as well as over the superstitions of Chaldea, Persia, and India. Uniting with Judaism, it became the cabalistic doctrine of the Jews; uniting with some faint rumours of Christianity, it flowed into the various heresies of the Gnostics. Nor could the religion of Mahomet, however averse from innovation, and ill suited for combination with foreign speculations, escape from its influence. Not only were the Sufis, or sages of Persia, deeply imbued with the mystic doctrines of the re-union of the soul to God, which was less wonderful, considering how long this system had been established in Persia before the time of Mahomet, but even the Arab writers adopted the same theory, and while outwardly conforming to the tenets of the Koran, maintained an inner and more spiritual creed, which one master after another transmitted to a number of zealous disciples.

But of all the emanative writers of the later times, the most illustrious is Jacob Behmen, the "divinely illuminated" Cobbler and "Teutonic Theosopher," who has been the apostle of the Mystics ever since, and who, in our days, has received the high praise of Coleridge and Schelling, who professed to have derived much advantage from the study of his

writings. Nor is it wonderful that he should attain such eminence. His biographer relates that not only a new star mystically appeared some time before his birth, but "when he was a herdsboy he had a most remarkable trial and providential preservation and prevention. For, in the heat of mid-day, retiring from his play-fellows to a little stony crag just by, called the Land's Crown, where the natural situation of the rock had made a seeming enclosure of some part of the mountain, finding an entrance, he went in, and saw there a large wooden vessel full of money, at which sight, being in a sudden astonished, he in haste retired, not moving his hand to it, and came and related his fortune to the rest of the boys, who, coming with him, sought often, and with much diligence, an entrance, but could not find any. But some years after, a foreign artist, as Jacob Behmen himself related, skilled in finding out magical treasures, took it away, and thereby much enriched himself, yet perished by an infamous death, that treasure being lodged there, and covered with a curse to him that should find it, and take it away." "In the twenty-fifth year of his age, he was surrounded by the divine light, and replenished with the heavenly knowledge; inasmuch as going abroad into the fields to a green before Neysgate at Gorlitz, he there sat down and viewing the herbs and grass of the field, in his inward light he saw into their essences, uses, and properties, which were discovered to him by their lineaments, figures, and signatures.

In like manner he beheld the whole creation, and from that fountain of revelation he afterwards wrote his book *De Signatura Rerum*." The senate of Gorlitz took the alarm at having one who saw so deep into the nature of things in their immediate neighbourhood, and commanded him to give over his visions, upon which he refrained from writing seven years. When, in despite of the *Senatus Consultum* of Gorlitz, "a new motion from on high" seizing on him, "in one quarter of an hour, I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at the university." And this he proves very clearly, "for he adds, I saw and knew the Being of all beings, the Byss and the Abyss, and the eternal generation of the Holy Trinity, the descent and original of the world, and of all creatures through the divine wisdom. I knew and saw in myself all the three worlds, namely, the divine, then the dark world, then the eternal visible world. And I saw and knew the whole working essence in the evil and the good, and the original and existence of each of them. So that I did not only wonder greatly at it, but did also exceedingly rejoice, and presently it came powerfully into my mind to set the same down in writing for a memorial for myself, though I could very hardly apprehend the same in my external man, and express it with the pen." But though all secret things were revealed to him, it was very evident that the mystery of spelling was an exception.

It would be doing injustice to the tenets of Behmen to endeavour to present them in any intelligible form ; still the principle which pervades his writings is that of the emanative system. In transcending all modifications of being, we arrive at last at absolute unity and infinity, at existence every way illimitable, in short, at infinite nothing, whose essence consists in the negation of every actual attribute, and yet which has the possibility of becoming all being. This possibility of existence impresses upon itself a trinity of being in the following manner. First, in desire, by which the Unity seeks itself, and this is the Father. Secondly, in delight, in which the Unity reflects upon itself, and this is the Son. Thirdly, in the outgoing, by which the Unity proceeds from itself, and this is the Spirit. Trinity in unity is the impress of all existence ; desire, delight, and outflowing being the three ways in which every being modifies itself. In our world universal magnetism stands in the place of the divine unity. When it desires to modify itself into matter, it becomes first entity or substance, then compressing "desire into delight," it becomes (subjectively) feeling or (objectively) working ; and, lastly, in the efflux of that working is the power or virtue residing in all things.

The doctrines of Behmen have met with two able supporters, Law in England, and St. Martin in France ; and the philosophers of Germany seem many of them more inclined to believe in the inspiration of Behmen than in that of the Bible. It was

fortunate for him that he was born in Germany. In countries less enlightened, instead of being venerated as a philosopher, he might have been confined as a lunatic.

VI. The third and lowest species of Mysticism may be termed the devotional, which, neglecting to explain the theory of the universe, follows that only which is practical in Mysticism, and is wholly intent upon re-uniting the soul to God by quietism and devout contemplation. Most of those who are Mystics of this class deny that they have any connexion with the theories of the ancient philosophers; still they may be traced in a direct line to the pantheistic sages of Greece and of the east. At times, even in those writings which have least pretensions to theory, the emanative system, with all its consequences, clearly breaks forth. "Il est aisé," says Madame Guion, "de comprendre que tous les esprits, étant émanés de Dieu, auroient un égal instinct de réunion à leur principe, s'ils étoient entièrement dégagés des obstacles qui empêchent cet union." "Lorsqu'ils sont dégagés selon leur degré, ils tendent ensemble selon le même degré à leur réunion: mais lorsqu'ils sont parfaitement purifiés, ils se perdent dans l'Unité et deviennent *un* dans cette perte, avec un rapport et une unité qu'on auroit peine à comprendre."* Another

* It is obvious, that all souls, having emanated from God, would have an equal instinctive propensity to re-unite with their source, if they were wholly released from the obstacles which prevent this union. In the degree in which they are released from them, in the same degree do they tend towards this re-union; but, when they

mystic writer, "le divin Jean de la Croix," has asserted in the most explicit terms the deification of human souls by their union with the divine Being.—"Ce sont des graces par lesquelles les ames qui les possèdent *deviennent véritablement des Dieux* par la participation qui leur a été faite de la nature divine."*

The great aim of devotional Mysticism is self-annihilation. "O Gloire de mon Dieu!" exclaims Madame Guion, "je ne désire que vous, mais pour lui seul! O Néant, que tu es heureux, et infiniment heureux! tu ne lui dérobes, point cette gloire. Tous les hommes qui tâchent d'en usurper quelque chose, sont des voleurs. Il n'y a que le néant qui ne dérobe et n'usurpe rien."† It is thus they strive to honour the Creator by endeavouring to uncreate themselves. As the Hindoo sages ascribe all misery and deception to the notion of self, so the Christian Mystics make all perfection consist in the loss of individuality. "Ce moi est haïssable."‡ The new life or regeneration consists, according to the Mystics, in self-annihilation. The

are completely purified, they lose themselves in the Unity, and become *one* by this loss, with a relation and a unity difficult to be comprehended.

* These are the graces by which the souls possessing them *become truly gods*, by the participation made to them of the divine nature.

† O glory of my God! I desire only thee, but for Him only! O Nothing, how happy, infinitely happy, thou art! Thou takest not from Him this glory! All men who endeavour to usurp any part of it are robbers. It is only Nothing, which takes away and usurps nothing.

‡ This *myself* is hateful.

work of the Holy Spirit consists in absorbing the finite soul into his own essence. "Le Saint Esprit sépare notre esprit du grossier de ce que nous avons de propre,—il l'attire, le perd et le mélange avec son Tout."* The loss of personality is the only way to die to the flesh and to the world. "Nous sortons de la circonference de la chair et du monde par la désappropriation."† Thus what the Mystics speak or think is no longer their own thought or expression, but a true inspiration from on high. "On ne peut rien faire par soi même ; mais un autre esprit se sert de la plume et de la langue de ces personnes ; et si cet esprit ne les anime pas, ils restent dans une pure ignorance ; et lorsqu'on leur parle de ce qu'ils ont écrit, et qu'on veut leur en faire rendre raison, ils sont souvent étonnés qu'il n'y entendent rien, à moins que cet esprit directeur ne le leur remette dans l'esprit."‡ Madame Guion adds, "J'ai tant écrit sur tout cela, que ceci suffit,"§ and most readers will probably be of the same opinion in this case.

* The Holy Spirit separates our soul from the grossness of what ever belongs to us, attracts it, loses and mingles it with his *whole*.

† By this separation from self, we go out of the circumference of the flesh and the world.

‡ They can do nothing of themselves ; another spirit makes use of the pen and tongue of these men : and if this spirit do not animate them, they remain in mere ignorance ; and even when we speak to them of what they have written, and wish them to explain it, they are often surprised to find that they understand nothing of it unless this directing spirit has replaced it in their mind.

§ I have written so much upon this whole matter, that this suffices.

In the writings ascribed to Thomas à Kempis, several of the peculiarities of Mysticism disappear. The writer professedly avoids all theory, and wishes merely to preserve a lowly and devotional frame of mind. But when the Romanists left the absurd ceremonies of their church in search of some better way of serving God than with these solemn mummeries, nothing better presented itself to them than the devotion of the Mystics. The Scriptures were either a sealed book to them, or, when studied at all, were looked at through a discoloured medium. Hence, without the writer being conscious of it, the piety of à Kempis has fully as much relation to the system of Pantheism, as to the truths of the Bible. As all religion, according to Pantheism, is founded upon union with the Deity, and as that union is only prevented by our individuality or selfishness, which willingly, and acting from itself and for itself, separates it from the universal ocean of Being into which it would otherwise be absorbed; so the first step of piety consists in quietism, or the ceasing to act or to will, and into the void thus formed by the destruction of the selfish principle, the divine Spirit as necessarily flows as air into a vacuum. Thus the Mystic is exhorted, if he wishes for religious knowledge, not to direct his attention to the truths of the Scriptures, but to pore upon the vacancy of his quiescent mind. "If thou withdrawest thy attention," says à Kempis, "from outward things, and keepest it fixed upon what passes within thee, thou wilt soon

perceive the coming of the kingdom of God." Every true Christian must consider himself as the chief of sinners as far as his own knowledge extends; with regard to others he is only acquainted with their sinful actions, without being aware of their peculiar temptations; with respect to himself alone he knows the multitude of warnings and admonitions from the word and the Spirit that he has slighted and opposed. In his own view, therefore, he may well consider himself as the chief of sinners, but can never be required along with the mystics to believe himself to be "less than the least of all human beings," a proposition which can only be true of one of the human race. This assertion, however, of each one being infinitely less than the least, is merely a milder form of the doctrine of self-annihilation. The doctrine of an immediate revelation to each Mystic is also maintained by à Kempis, though in more qualified terms than by Madame Guion. Christ is made to say, "I taught the prophets from the beginning, and even till now cease not to speak unto all." And the disciple also says unto Christ, "Let not Moses speak to me or any of the prophets, but speak thou, O Lord God, the inspirer and enlightener of all the prophets, for thou alone, without their intervention, canst perfectly instruct me, but without thee they can profit me nothing." These assertions are, however, so far explained away by the sentences which follow, that they appear to refer less to any new information to be acquired, than to revelation being

brought home to the mind by the divine power. And it is to be remarked, that Thomas à Kempis is only mystical in the lowest degree, not venturing into the depths of speculation, but adopting those sentiments and that turn of thought which lies upon the surface of the mystic writers : à Kempis possesses much of that spirit which the Hindoo Deity, Crishnu, honours with his approbation. “ He is worthy of my love who neither requireth nor findeth fault ; who neither lamenteth nor coveteth ; and being my servant, hath forsaken both good and evil fortune ; who is the same in friendship and in hatred, in honour and dishonour, in cold and in heat, in pain and in pleasure ; who is insouciant about the events of things ; to whom praise and blame are as one ; who is of a little spirit, and is pleased with whatever cometh to pass.” In the writings of à Kempis as of all the other Mystics, the great scriptural doctrine of the atonement, as shall be afterwards noticed, is either omitted, or entirely misrepresented, and the whole of religion is grounded on an imaginary union of the soul with the universal Being. But however erroneous à Kempis and many others of the Mystics may be, and however calculated they are to mislead the serious inquirer after truth into visionary and dangerous opinions, yet the reader cannot doubt that they were men of genuine piety themselves, that what is excellent in them is to be ascribed to the divine teaching, and that their errors are to be attributed in no small degree to the corrupt church of

Rome, which left no other way open to them, but that of mystical devotion. A pleasing sample of that devotion, and free from many of its grosser errors, is given in the translation by Cowper of some verses of Madame Guion.

I

'Twas my purpose, on a day,
To embark and sail away ;
As I climb'd the vessel's side,
Love was sporting in the tide
"Come," he said,—“ascend—make haste
Launch into the boundless waste.”

2

Many mariners were there,
Having each his separate care ;
They that rowed us, held their eyes
Fixed upon the starry skies ;
Others steer'd, or turn'd the sails
To receive the shifting gales.

3

Love with pow'r divine supplied,
Suddenly my courage tried ;
In a moment it was night,
Ship and skies were out of sight :
On the briny wave I lay,
Floating rushes all my stay.

4

Did I with resentment burn
At this unexpected turn ?
Did I wish myself on shore,
Never to forsake it more ?
No—“My sou”—I cried, “be still ;
If I must be lost, I will.”

5

Next he hasten'd to convey
Both my frail supports away ;
Seized my rushes ; bade the waves
Yawn into a thousand graves ;
Down I went, and sunk as lead,
Ocean closing o'er my head.

6

Still, however, life was safe ;
And I saw him turn and laugh :
" Friend," he cried, " adieu ! lie low ;
While the wintry storms shall blow ;
When the spring has calm'd the main
You shall rise and float again."

7

Soon I saw him, with dismay,
Spread his wings and soar away ;
Now I mark his rapid flight ;
Now he leaves my aching sight ;
He is gone whom I adore,
'Tis in vain to seek him more.

8

How I trembled then and fear'd,
When my love had disappear'd !
" Wilt thou leave me thus," I cried,
" Whelm'd beneath the rolling tide ?"
Vain attempt to reach his ear !
Love was gone and would not hear

9

Ah ! return and love me still ;
See me subject to thy will ;
Frown with wrath, or smile with grace
Only let me see thy face !
Evil I have none to fear,
All is good if thou art near.

10

Yet he leaves me—cruel fate !
Leaves me in my lost estate—
Have I sinn'd ? Oh say wherein :
Tell me, and forgive my sin !
King, and Lord, whom I adore,
Shall I see thy face no more ?

11

Be not angry ; I resign,
Henceforth, all my will to thine ;
I consent that thou depart,
Though thine absence break my heart ;
Go, then, and for ever too ;
All is right that thou wilt do.

12

'This was just what Love intended,
He was now no more offended ;
Soon as I became a child,
Love return'd to me and smiled :
Never strife shall more betide
'Twixt the bridegroom and his bride.

VII. Mysticism is now rather practical than speculative, still influencing the sentiments of devotion, where such works as those of à Kempis are read and imitated, but no longer moulding the speculations of philosophy, with the single exception of Germany. In that country Pantheism has had a great revival amongst those who reject the inspiration of the Bible, and who attempt, from their preconceived opinions, and by pretended demonstrations, to give a theory of the universe. And it is necessary that it should be so ; for whoever grounds his reasonings upon the abstract notion of existence, will fall into

the same error with the ancients, seeing that Pantheism is implied in the very principle from which they set out ; for whatever is absolutely demonstrable, must, of course, be absolutely necessary. The error consists in mistaking the hypothetical fancy of their imagination for the reality of things : the pantheistic deity of the transcendental writers is the veriest chimaera that ever occupied a Utopia of its own, compared with which the “ dream of a shadow ” appears a substantial existence. But true philosophy has expelled these errors from a considerable portion of the world, and is daily, though slowly, gaining ground. Opposite errors may for a time support each other, as one extreme always leads to another ; and the material Atheism of the French has been the great supporter of the ideal Pantheism of the Germans. But errors are in their nature mortal ; and when they are continued, it is by variety and succession, and not by perpetuity. There are some favourable symptoms, both in the literature of France and of Germany, and saner views of nature, we trust, will gradually prevail. Above all, the religion of the Bible, as it gains ground amongst men, will reveal the true character of the Deity ; and the belief in Jehovah will finally destroy every idolatry under heaven, whether it consists in the worship of idols of wood and stone, or of the more specious, but as worthless, idols of the imagination.

VIII. Mysticism is natural to the mind, because Pantheism is so. Wherever revelation is disregarded.

we see men, who trust to their own understanding, in all countries and ages, relapsing into the emanative system. Those who trust to their own heart slide into a mystical devotion, dreaming that they are emanations from the Deity, and seek to re-unite themselves to the divine essence. Their imagination of the Deity recedes more and more from the character of the God of the Scriptures. The holiness of Jehovah, which will not suffer his law to be violated with impunity, is less and less attended to, and an infinite and indiscriminate love is supposed to be recalling all creatures, not so much from sin as from selfishness, and as rather ingulfing them into the divine Being than conforming them to the divine character. When we say that this system is natural to the mind, we should restrict it to a particular stage of its progress ; to the twilight which intervenes between the darkness of ignorance and the light of truth, and to a condition of society, where the mind is contemplative rather than active, and where contemplation, having but few useful truths to meditate upon, is fruitful only in chimeras. The same turn of mind which leads to false systems of philosophy leads also to false systems of devotion. Theories of the universe are excogitated as wild and groundless as the Arabian Tales, but without their brilliant fancy and vivid interest ; and works of piety are produced which lead the reader from the Bible, instead of bringing him to it, and which fill their votaries with dreams as airy and evanescent as if they were

busied in the chase of vanity, and intent upon acquiring the unsubstantial possessions of this world.

IX. Mysticism nearly resembles the truth, and yet is essentially distinct from it. We must, therefore, be careful, on the one hand, not to mistake the shadow for the substance, and, on the other, not to reject truth because it may have a certain likeness to error. The deified universe of the Pantheists has, of course, some points of agreement with the scriptural notion of the true Jehovah. Being the universe, it is universally present, and out of its infinite fullness it is supposed to fill all things. The Pantheists are continually quoting St. Paul ; "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." But how different is the sense of these words in the mouth of St. Paul and in theirs. In the true Jehovah we live both our natural and our spiritual life, but without partaking of his incommunicable essence. He is infinitely near to us by his universal presence and energy, and infinitely distant from us by his absolute perfection. The phantom of the Pantheists, on the contrary, which exists but in their deluded imagination, is one and indivisible with his votaries. His substance is the stuff of which they are made, and the gulf into which they must return. Pantheism and Mysticism, while they pretend to spirituality, are, in fact, but disguised materialism ; the object of their worship is the sensible universe, beheld dim, and magnified, through the mists of a beclouded imagination

"Jupiter est quodcunque vides quocunque moveres."^{*}

The Christian looks forward to being a partaker of the divine nature, and to being one with Christ, as he is one with the Father, but never supposes with the Mystics that he is to be fused into the divine essence. His union with God consists, he well knows, in having Christ for his living head, and in his being made a temple of the most high God, by the holy Spirit dwelling in him throughout eternity. But this is infinitely different from supposing that we shall flow into the divine nature like drops into the ocean of boundless Being.

Christianity directs us to love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Here the love of self is implied to be a holy affection in its right place and degree. The Mystics, in defiance of sense and Scripture, suppose the love of self in all its forms and degrees to be sin, and contend that the principle of self must be destroyed before we can love God in sincerity. This foolish notion prevails amongst many of the former American divines, who insist upon the destruction of a principle, which God himself has planted in the mind of man, as a pre-requisite and qualification before any one can believe in Christ, and who, in effect, if not in words, maintain that every one must be willing to be damned before he can hope to be saved.

^{*} Jupiter is, whatsoever thou seest, whithersoever thou goest.

The stricter mystics contend for self-annihilation, the more moderate compound for the disciple making himself "infinitely little." It would be curious to see a revelation adapted to the Mystics, it must confine itself entirely to the use of impersonal verbs. "Taulere demandoit au mendiant, où il avait trouvé Dieu, qui lui répondit, où je me suis quitté moi-même. O ! les admirables paroles !"* adds Madame Guion ; and thus we see, it is more easy for a man to get quit of himself, than to get rid of the personal pronouns.

The faith of a Christian consists in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ ; the degrees of faith may differ, but the more faith increases, the more clearly the divine object of faith is revealed. The highest attainment of mystical faith is a belief which believes nothing, where the mind has no distinct proposition before it, and where, of course, nothing can be either denied or affirmed.—"La Foi pure, qui se sépare peu à peu non seulement du sensible, du distinct, et du matériel, mais même de l'aperçu, pour entrer peu à peu dans la nudité totale."†

In Christianity the first step is to believe in the Saviour. "What shall I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved." The believer is first justified, and then purified or sanctified,

* Taulere asked a mendicant, 'where he had found God?' Who answered him, 'where I had rid myself of myself!' O admirable words!

† That is pure Faith, which gradually separates itself, not only from the sensible, the distinct, and the material, but even from the *perceived*, and gradually arrives at complete nakedness.

by faith. But, according to the mystical system, the disciple must be purified before he can believe, he must get rid of self first, for till then his belief would be only a selfish belief.

According to Christianity, whosoever believes in the Lord Jesus receives all the benefits of the great atonement ; his sins are blotted out like a thick cloud, and remembered no more against him for ever ; the divine law is fulfilled for him, and all his transgressions of that law are immediately expunged. According to the mystical system, there is no other law than that of the divine substance flowing out into the production of innumerable finite spirits—of these spirits contracting pollution by the selfish principle—and of the return of these spirits to God, by the destruction of that principle. Thus, in Mysticism, there is nothing corresponding to the Christian notion of sin. There is one error, the belief in self ; and one truth, the identity of all things with the Deity. As, according to this scheme, there is, strictly speaking, no law on the part of God, and no sin on the part of man, there is no divine attribute of justice to be appeased, or positive punishments to be undergone ; the only misery that exists is the natural punishment that proceeds from selfishness. God necessarily loves all that exists, because nothing exists but himself. It is only selfishness which hinders us from perceiving this love of God towards all things. There is therefore no atonement, in the Christian sense of the term. God is not angry, ar

therefore cannot be appeased ; there is no satisfaction to his justice, for he has no justice to satisfy. The only atonement we have need of is, an At-onement, or a mode of becoming one with the divine essence. Those pantheist writers, who consider Christ as our atonement, merely believe him to be the medium, or channel, by which we flow back into the divine Being.

It may be asked how the Mystics who profess Christianity, reconcile these notions to divine revelation. It is by a method which has been practised in all ages, by which one set of opinions may easily and successfully be ingrafted upon any other system of opinions, however diametrically opposite they may be. This method is generally called spiritualizing. It was first practised by the philosophers of antiquity, upon their own mythology, and upon their ancient poets. Homer, from having called the ocean the father of gods and men, was pressed into the service of his theory by Thales, who makes him assert the origin of all things from water. The Stoics were so expert in this sort of spiritualizing and allegorizing, that they made the whole of the ancient literature of Greece wear the hue of their peculiar opinions, as Cicero observes, "*Ut etiam veterrimi poetæ, qui hæc ne suspicati quidem sint, Stoici fuisse videantur.*"* The Alexandrian school were still more eminent spiritualizers than

* So that even the most ancient poets, who never even dreamed of such notions, would seem to have been Stoics.

the Stoics ; and Origen, their well instructed disciple, made the outward sense of Scripture give place to the higher and more spiritual meaning which he conceived to lurk under it. By lineal descent his method has been inherited by the mystics ; and, while the obvious sense of the Bible is left to the uninitiated, the enlightened few, enjoy an inner revelation appropriated to themselves, and conformable to the doctrines of Pantheism.

Not that they are strictly tied down to this inner sense of the Scriptures ; they claim to have more immediate and individual communications addressed to their inward man ; discoveries of the inmost nature of things, and perceptions of the divine existence, (as some inform us, who make a vehement profession of Christianity by law established,) more magnificent than were vouchsafed to the Hebrew prophets of old.

X. Mysticism, which was first favourable to the reformation of religion, since that reformation has taken place, has become decidedly adverse to it, and is more indulgent to Popery than to Protestantism. During the dark ages, the Mystics opposed the gross superstitions and the material worship of Popery, which it saw clearly to be the religion of this world. The Mystics often indicate that the Pope, with the pomp of his worship, and the tyranny of his power, is the corrupter of true religion ; taking care, however, not to commit themselves too far, and to speak only to the initiated. Their hopes of reformation

were all directed within, and the renovation of the earth was, in their notions, to be accomplished by very different weapons from what the reformers used. Plain scriptural statements of truth were as adverse to Mysticism as to Popery, there was nothing of that dreamy quietism about the heralds of the reformation, which would have marked them out as the true sons of illumination in the eyes of the Mystics ; no still whispers from the inner shrine of Pantheism ; nothing but forcible appeals to the obvious sense of Scripture, fervid eloquence, and vehement action. The truth of the Bible was strongly enforced, and strongly defined, chasing away before it the errors alike of the Polytheist, and the Pantheist, and the One true God, and the One Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus, was preached, and held forth to all men in the infinity of his love, but also with the severity of his justice, and the purity of his holiness.

The Mystics, like every other class of men who felt the existing state of the world adverse to their peculiar views, looked forward to the commencement of the French Revolution, as a new era of hope and emancipation. "*Tout nous porte sans doute,*" as St. Martin observes, "*à espérer un règne sabbatique sur la terre pour terminer le temps, comme nous en voyons un terminer la formation de l'univers.*"* The

* Every thing unquestionably leads us to expect a sabbatical reign upon earth to terminate time, as we have seen it terminate the creation of the universe.

very crimes of France, its utter demoralization, and its undisguised atheism, inspired St. Martin with hopes that in his native country that sabbatical reign would first commence, since evil there appeared to have reached its utmost height, and since the severest judgments were impending upon them in consequence ; and these judgments, he doubted not, would terminate in the French all becoming Mystics. That sabbatical reign he considered as progressive ; first individual, then national, lastly universal. The complete establishment of the spiritual kingdom upon earth he thought would not take place in less than two hundred years after the convulsions in France. St. Martin and his followers are erroneously accused of taking any active share in the Revolution, or of looking with any degree of favour on those who promoted it ; the infidel philosophers they considered as “brigands” who ought to be repressed and punished for the good of society, and the only part they thought it right to take in political affairs, was continually to pray that all changes might tend to the furtherance of Mysticism.

Mysticism does not thrive in Protestant countries ; it still finds the ignorance of Popery, and the indolence of a monastery, most favourable to its growth. The ceremonies of Romish superstition, much as it may despise them, are more pliant to its reveries than the imperativeness of Protestant truth. Whilst it shelters in the shade of Popery, and reposes itself under its protection, it often dreams, as we have re-

marked, that the power that protects it shall be cast down by some of the approaching changes which are coming over the world, that Mysticism shall step into its vacant place, that an "interior" reform shall change the face of the earth, and that the predicted reign of Christ shall be the triumph of Mysticism. But though Popery must fall, the Mystics will not survive to profit by it. Truth is lifting up the veil both from the works, and from the word of God ; the impious dream of worshipping either a part, or the whole of creation, will vanish, and every remnant of Pantheism, as well as of Polytheism, will be swept away.

PART FIFTH.

HERESIES AFTER THE REFORMATION

- I. Difference of Heresies before and after the Reformation.
- II. Continual protest against the Church of Rome.
- III. Different Points of Progress in the Reformation.
- IV. Artificial systems of Truth.
- V. Scriptural system.
- VI. Use of Reason in Religion.
- VII. Abuse of Reason.
- VIII. Gradual explaining away the Doctrines of the Gospel.
- IX. All error on a Precipice.
- X. Process of Dr. Priestley's Changes.
- XI. Latitudinarianism unfavourable to Morals and Philosophy.
- XII. "Rational" Divinity untenable in all its changes.
- XIII. Socinianism rapidly terminating in Infidelity.

PAR'T V.

HERESIES AFTER THE REFORMATION.

I. THERE is a great difference between the heresies before and after the reformation. Early errors in religion arose from preconceived opinion ; but Popery had swallowed all other errors, and interposed the great gulf of the dark ages between ancient and modern times. Those who opposed Popery could only appeal to reason or to Scripture, or to the authority of the first Fathers ; the only prejudices they had were necessarily derived from the Romish superstition itself, and the mistakes they were in danger of committing, proceeded from an imperfect reasoning, or from an imperfect acquaintance with the Scriptures. Thus, if we except the errors occasioned by retaining some of the tenets, or principles, or ceremonies of Popery, the great source of modern heresy amongst Protestants must be attributed to partial induction, either to not laying a broad enough foundation of their creed in the Scriptures, or to not raising the superstructure of their belief according to the rules of legitimate reasoning. The human

mind was again to exhibit itself as averse to divine truth under the most favourable circumstances ; the gospel had been preached by the first reformers with great power and with considerable simplicity, but each succeeding generation seemed to depart further from the pure model of the Scriptures ; religion again became technical and disputative, even where its essential articles of faith were best preserved ; and in most cases it became first formal and then erroneous. The copious influence of the Spirit which had characterized the early days of the revival of religious knowledge, was gradually withdrawn, and the doctrines of the reformers continued to possess a nominal authority, merely that they might brand with infamy the perjured dishonesty of numbers who signed the established creed, while, without a blush, they could preach the most opposite errors.

II. Previous to the reformation, there were many efforts at reform, though too feeble to be effectual. And even where reform was utterly hopeless, there was yet a continual protest against the dominant corruptions of Popery. Besides the Mystics, who made several attempts to undermine the reigning superstition, eminent men, thinly scattered like lights through the darkness which they vainly endeavoured to dissipate, protested all along against the tyrannic usurpations of Rome, and without being the adherents of a sect, appealed to the authority of revelation and reason. The two witnesses prophesying in sack-cloth, as represented in the Apocalypse, presented a

wonderfully exact picture of the condition of the dark ages, where the martyrs of the truth, few in number, but sufficient to keep up a perpetual testimony, denounced at best to a careless, and often to an unfriendly world, the antichristian authority of the Man of Sin, and proclaimed, in some degree, the freedom of truth, and of conscience.

The Romanist writers have attempted to identify these early Protestants with various heretics, such as the Arians, and Manicheans, but it is evident that this old departure of many of them from the church of Rome, proceeded from their acquaintance with the Scriptures, partial as it often was, and that whatever errors they might have, were but the remaining corruptions of Popery, which they had not light enough to discern and cast away. Perhaps it may not be sufficiently noticed by protestant writers in general, that the sweeping persecution of the Romish church, which endeavoured at once to crush whatever opposed its authority, drove occasionally Arian, and Manichean heretics to the same retreats, along with the men whose faith was founded upon the Scriptures alone, so that very various characters, though dissimilar and hostile to each other, might often seek the same shelter during the violence of the storm. But these hereties, if there were any such mingled with the orthodox, (for the accusations of the Papists possess little authority,) must have been insignificant both in number and influence, since their opinions are scarcely to be distinctly traced in the accounts

which have been transmitted to us by the Papists themselves. The supposition, however, of these heresies lying dormant amongst some who were persecuted by the Papists during the dark ages, would account for their sudden though partial revival at the reformation.

The spread of the reformed doctrines amongst the Albigenses so early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, gave an early promise of what increasing knowledge would be able to effect, when new facilities for diffusing information were to be afforded. And it is delightful to observe, that the early but transitory reform in the south of France was as much distinguished by the purity of its morals, as by the truth of its doctrines. The zeal and disinterested labours of the primitive Christians seemed to revive with their faith. The Albigenses, wherever they went, won converts by their holy life, as well as by their invincible arguments. But the time was not yet come when the tenth part of Babylon was to fall; they had not the aid of printing to diffuse their opinions over the world; and the Inquisition drowned the voice of these living witnesses in their blood.

III. Before the appearance of Luther, the church of Rome appeared stronger than ever; it had silenced every voice that was raised against it; the witnesses for the truth were slain. Knowledge was increasing, but, bribed by the patronage of Popery, it was no longer favourable to religious truth. When

the dispute with Luther began about indulgences, all was serene in the papal world, except that dark speck on the horizon which suddenly overspread the heavens. There is a striking contrast between the slow and gradual progress of the great reformer's own mind in the discovery of each succeeding truth, and the rapidity with which each truth, as soon as it was discovered and proclaimed, was immediately believed and transmitted throughout the Christian and learned world. Luther had but to speak, and conviction followed. Interest and ignorance were indeed too hard in most cases for the reformer, but wherever unprejudiced learning sat as his judge, the decision was instantaneous in his favour. The understandings of men were ripe to receive the truth, and had not the kings of the earth agreed to lend their power to support the Beast, the idols of Popery, like the idols of Paganism, would have been thrown long ere now to the moles and to the bats.

It is evident that Luther had no conception how far he was going when he first set out. Every year he threw away more of the absurdities of Popery, and if, at the end of each year, a certain number of his disciples had refused to proceed further, and had modelled themselves into a religious society, according to the mind of the reformer, at the moment they parted from him, we should have had a number of additional sects to augment the list of heresies, which Popery triumphs so much in displaying. Something of this kind has actually happened, if not with re-

gard to their disciples, yet in the case of the reformers themselves. Luther went to a certain extent, Calvin still further, and some others of the reformed considerably beyond both. Thus we have the first source of disputes amongst the reformed in the different distances which they respectively judged it expedient to remove from Rome.

In this point of view, the reformed may be considered as falling under three classes. The first look back to the time of Constantine as the golden age of Christianity, and unite, in a certain subordinate authority to the Scriptures, the writings of the earlier Fathers. The second take the Bible alone for their guide, but join the polity and temper of the Jewish republic to the milder genius of Christianity. The third trust they have erected the genuine model of a Christian church, simply upon the hints and notices contained in the New Testament, though with respect to these notices, they are continually at variance among themselves.

IV. The number of disputes was again considerably increased by the use of a technical theology. There can be no doubt as to the utility of the system for the attainment of sound and stable knowledge. But there are two systematic methods, the one natural and the other artificial. The one submits itself to the nature of things, the other bends the nature of things to its own immediate utility and purposes. It is the merit, as well as the defect of artificial systems, that they accommodate themselves to the weak

ness of our faculties, if not always to the amplitude of truth. They assist our memory, and present to us a brief and compendious arrangement, though we must ever have recourse to the natural method, as that alone which corresponds to the reality of things. The natural method of studying the Bible is contained in the Scriptures themselves ; every truth is there represented in its just order and due prominence, but an artificial method, where all the portions of Scripture are grouped together after some system, or according to some theory, has been more prevalent. Nothing is more alien from the genius of Aristotle than the genius of the Scriptures ; but the logic of Aristotle is the weapon of which all verbal disputants naturally avail themselves. The Stagirite was pressed into the service of Christianity, and scriptural truth was divided and subdivided, till even the most insignificant tenets assumed as many heads as the Hydra. Christianity can scarcely be recognised in the form in which it is presented by the schoolmen, with all its original lineaments obscured, and nothing presented to the student, but a number of idle and vexatious questions.

Though at the Reformation much of this rubbish was cast aside, still the reformers were not sufficiently aware of the utter worthlessness of the whole process. Christianity again began to be studied in systems and bodies of divinity, instead of being taken freshly from the Scriptures, and its truths, instead of being eminently practical, and bearing immediately

upon the conscience, became airy speculative dogmas, barren in good works, but fruitful in disputations. The Bible clearly and invincibly shows that Christ is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God ; but it shows this to us, not with a view of explaining to us in what manner the Godhead exists, but in what manner our salvation is carried on ; it unveils to us not the mutual relation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which it is neither profitable nor possible for us to know, but our relations to God, as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. But how different is the trinity of the schoolmen, who talk with as much ease and familiarity of the Three Persons of the Godhead, as of the three sides of a triangle, and how different even is the trinity of many protestant systematic divines, who darken wisdom by words without knowledge, and neglect the wise caution contained in the advice given in Ecclesiastes : "God is in heaven and thou upon earth ; therefore let thy words be few."

The departure from the scriptural words of soberness, and truth, in the various disputes of the reformed amongst each other, is very conspicuous, and in no instance more so than in the controversy between the Calvinists and the Arminians, and in the discussions relative to the five points, whether predestination was absolute, redemption universal, depravity total, grace irresistible, and perseverance certain and final. A reader, who had formed his judgment from the Scriptures alone, and held fast

both the expressions, and form of sound doctrine, would be able to go all lengths with neither party. It is indeed evident, that the Arminians were labouring under a fundamental error, and that their doctrines contained a root of departure from the faith; still the exaggerated and unscriptural statements of many of their opponents, though not equally dangerous, are highly censurable, and had a large share in driving the Arminians into the opposite extreme. It will be a happy time for Christianity, when those who teach others, shall themselves cease from man, and call no man master upon earth, but receive instruction pure and unadulterated from the lively oracles of God.

V. The scriptural system, instead of a collection of speculative notions, brings truth immediately home to the heart. It does not present truth abstractedly and absolutely, but relatively to man's present condition. It finds and addresses each man as a sinner, and it makes the hopelessness of his present condition the ground upon which all the provisions of his safety and happiness proceed.

It is necessary for the conviction of gainsayers to draw out occasionally the proofs of Christ's Deity, to show that neither the language, nor the connexion and order of the sacred writings, will in any wise permit these proofs to be explained away, and this is sufficient to carry deep conviction to every unbiassed understanding. But how much deeper is the conviction from the Scriptures themselves, when simply and inartificially they represent infinite love

descending from heaven to save a lost race. God manifest in the flesh, and shining to the eye of faith through the veil that obscured his glory, and revealing the Father, not by arguments, but by the divine energy of his works, and the divine holiness of his words, till each who is taught by the Spirit exclaims with unshaken confidence, "My Lord and my God." There is a reality and a vital power in the divine method of the Scriptures themselves, which more powerfully affects the mind than the exactness of human systems can do, and though it be necessary to select and combine passages of Scripture for peculiar objects, the more closely we can keep to the Scriptures, in their original connexion, and living unity, the better.

VI. The use of reason in religion and philosophy, is the same. As without facts, we can gain no knowledge of nature, so without inspired truths, which are God's statement of facts either future or invisible, we can make no discoveries in religion. The use of reason, therefore, is to enable us to become intelligent listeners to the divine voice, and to open out to us the scope and purport of the inspired oracles. When we understand whatever has been affirmed by the prophets and the apostles, we have reached the ultimate limits of religious knowledge. This, and not the addition of our own speculations, is the end of all rational inquiry with respect to revelation. Had we any doubts respecting the feebleness of the human faculties, and their utter inability

to discover divine truth, when not enlightened from on high, we need only look to the greatest minds that have ever existed, groping about in the darkness of antiquity, and falling from one depth of absurdity into another. Our great object is not to bend the discoveries of revelation, so as to meet our own opinions, but to cast away all our prejudices, and approaching divine truth with unoccupied minds, to make the thoughts of the inspired writers our own. We must place ourselves in the point of view from which the Bible contemplates surrounding objects, that we may see all things in the clear light of revelation. We must feel as well as think with the inspired writers, and, entering into their sentiments and reasonings, be carried along with the main stream of their argument, till we arrive at all their conclusions, and find their thoughts possessing our minds, and their very words rising to our lips. Thus we shall be cast into the mould of divine revelation, and take the stamp of its godlike and immortal image; and as, at the revival of letters, it was the ambition of the Ciceronians to write upon all occasions like Cicero, clothing whatever they had to advance with his turn of thought and mode of expression; so in taking the Bible to be our guide to sacred truth, we may enter with equal clearness into the divine thoughts, and make it the standard of our judgment and feeling, even in things remotely connected with revelation; bearing its tone of sentiment upon our

hearts, like a strain of music, which blends with the imagination, long after the instrument is silent.

VII. The use of reason in religion is to enlarge our minds to the amplitude of truth ; but the abuse of reason is more common, which would contract truth to the narrowness of our understanding. Men, upon all other subjects save religion, confess their natural ignorance ; they come to the first elements of doctrine as learners, and not as judges : if they find out any thing incomprehensible, or are startled at any conclusion, they attribute the difficulty not to the master, but to the scholar ; and never deny any proposition on the mere ground of their not comprehending it. But far different is the case with those who are called rational divines, though confessedly ignorant of the nature of every atom that surrounds them, they can pronounce, *a priori*, with the utmost confidence concerning the mode of the divine existence. They dogmatize with as much boldness regarding what is possible, and what is impossible, to be believed concerning God, as if they carried a model of the Deity within them.

Reason and revelation are thus absurdly set at variance with each other ; and with still more absurdity, reason is made the judge of an acknowledged revelation, and the weak and shallow opinions of man are made to limit and modify the communications which the Infinite has given relating to himself. " We neither can nor ought," says Socinius, " to be brought by the plain words of the Holy Spirit him

self, to admit any thing which is contrary to nature." This maxim is not confined to the Socinians, but common to the "rational" divines. Episcopius lays it down as one of the rules of Arminian theology: "*Quicquid ratio humana falsum esse reprehendit id nullo pacto pro vero in divinis habendum est.*"* And what is this reason which he has so confidently made the judge of the intimations of the divine will, and the discoveries of the divine character proceeding from God himself, ratified by miracles, and invested with the authority of the Deity? Though the latitudinarian divines are constantly appealing to the authority of reason, none seem anxious to define exactly what it is. According to their system of philosophy, however, reason can be little more than the power of deducing inferences from the notices which fall under our senses. Most of the self-entitled Rationalists have been advocates for that theory of the mind which was supported by Epicurus, and revived by Gassendi, and which makes sense, not only the origin, but nearly, if not altogether, the judge of truth, and the limit of our intelligence. Thus rational divinity, furnished only with what it collects of information from those narrow inlets which it believes to be the sources of all the knowledge it can acquire, sits in judgment on the declarations of the Most High, and boldly rejects whatever surpasses the

* Whatever human reason stigmatizes as false, should by no means be admitted as true in theology.

measure of its shallow capacity. But this is too favourable a view of rational theology, which has not even the support of the few facts relating to God's government which might be gathered by a partial observation of human affairs. When it is said that a doctrine is contrary to reason, it is not any fact in general that is brought forward against it, or even reasoning, but merely an appeal that is made to our preconceived opinions respecting the divine nature. But since preconceived opinions upon all subjects are utterly worthless, and since no valuable truth is discovered by conjecture, but by the patient induction of facts, and by legitimate reasonings grounded upon them, it is evident that the pretended appeal to reason is merely an appeal to ignorance or error. Accordingly, the rational divines, having solely a fictitious standard of judgment, not only vary amongst each other, but each one varies from himself. The self-entitled reason of one rejects what the reason of another receives; and individuals, in the latter part of their life, look back upon truths which they had formerly maintained, as irrational and incomprehensible.

VIII. Thus the doctrines of the gospel are gradually explained away. A false principle is admitted, that no doctrine is to be received that is contrary to reason. This is true in the highest sense. No doctrine is to be received which is contrary to truth, or unsupported by sufficient evidence. But the principle is false in the sense in which it is usually as-

serted by the rationalists, where reason stands merely for the preconceived opinions and shallow reasoning of each individual who presumes to determine upon the truth of doctrines without examining the evidence which may be adduced for them. An Arminian divine judges that the doctrine of original sin is contrary to the attribute of divine justice. He thinks, however, that he could admit the doctrine, if proposed in a milder form. He, therefore, tries to soften and mitigate the expressions of Scripture. The same tendency of mind which induces him to place the depravity of human nature more out of sight, leads him to explain away also the nature of the atonement. As he considers original sin to be the transmission of a certain bodily constitution, so he looks upon the atonement in the light of an example, rather than of a vicarious punishment. The Deity of Christ is treated in a more philosophic and rational manner; and the Saviour, instead of being considered as absolutely God, is argued to possess a secondary and derivative divinity.

Thus the first steps of rational Christianity, like the last, are full of absurdity. In attempting to do justice, as they conceive, to the unity of the Deity, the rational divine is so unfortunate as to introduce two Gods instead of one, a superior and an inferior divinity. The Arian, while he perceives the errors of the Arminian and semi-Arian, and that they are only exchanging mysteries for absurdities, thinks that he escapes from their difficulties by boldly affirm-

ing Christ to be a mere creature. But, in attempting to escape from the Polytheism of the semi-Arian, he falls into a gross idolatry, for he still recognises in Christ, a character, and attributes which belong to the Creator, and he is equally discountenanced and condemned by the pretended reason to which he appeals, and by the obvious declarations of Scripture which he in vain attempts to garble and evade. The Arian finds himself in a position where it is impossible to stop ; his downfall into Socinianism is precipitous and unavoidable. The Socinian, indeed, throws away all mysteries ; according to his system there is nothing wonderful, except that the sacred writers should have been so miserably ill qualified for the task assigned to them, and should have expressed themselves with a vagueness and obscurity which it requires the united efforts of Socinian genius to clear away ; while the meanest of their own preachers finds no difficulty in explaining to the illiterate vulgar that Jesus Christ is a mere man. Lastly, the anti-supernaturalist, coming close upon the heels of the Socinian, and treating with merited contempt his wretched efforts, in defiance of Greek and common sense, to expunge the Deity of Christ from the Scriptures, boldly and honestly casts aside the authority of inspiration, though he freely owns, now that they are no longer imperative upon him, that the doctrines of original sin, of the Deity of Christ, and of the atonement, are strongly maintained in the Bible.

IX. Thus all error is placed upon a precipice. The second step leads more rapidly to the third than the first to the second. Old opinions and habitudes may break for a time the rapidity of the descent. A degree of reverence for the Scriptures may prevent the heretic in the first instance from doing the utmost violence to their meaning, and may lead him gently to tamper with it, rather than forcibly to wrest it. But this check, the result of early education, or of serious impressions in youth, becomes weaker and weaker, and at last altogether gives way ; and the pretended follower of reason, in his downward progress, passes from opinion to opinion, with accelerated velocity, and only comes to a pause at last, because his scanty creed admits of no further curtailment.

The first latitudinarians, like men treading upon unsafe ice, proceeded with due caution, and no one went an arm's length before another. The Arian had always an Arminian pioneer, and the Socinian had his way made patent by some Arian predecessor. But men in the course of time became more daring ; the process of heresy, which formerly was only completed in several generations, was latterly exemplified in the course of a single life, and Priestly, in his rapid career, passed through every shade of heresy, from ultra-orthodoxy to ultra-Socinianism.

X. Priestly began his career by being an ultra-Calvinist. "He was much distressed," according to his own account, "that he could not feel a proper repentance for the sin of Adam ; from this distress he

found a refuge first in "Baxterianism," and, "thinking farther on these subjects," he became an "Arminian." "Believing that a new birth produced by the immediate agency of the Spirit of God was necessary to salvation, and not being able to satisfy myself that I had experienced any thing of the kind, I felt occasionally such distress of mind as it is not in my power to describe, and which I still look back upon with horror. Notwithstanding I had nothing very material to reproach myself with, I often concluded that God had forsaken me, and that mine was like the case of Francis Spira, to whom, as he imagined, repentance and salvation were denied. In that state of mind I remember reading the account of the man in the iron cage, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, with the greatest perturbation." He adds, that the remembrance of what he felt at these times, "gave him a peculiar sense of the value of rational principles of religion," that is, of those principles which reject the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.

As the tide in his own mind was setting in strongly towards heresy, so the academy to which he was sent, was well fitted to encourage the growth of presumption and error. "In my time the academy," says Priestley, and he says it not ironically, "was in a state peculiarly favourable to the serious pursuit of truth, as the students were about equally divided upon every question of much importance, such as liberty and necessity, the sleep of the soul, and all the articles of theological orthodoxy and heresy, in

consequence of which, all these topics were the subject of continual discussion." "Our tutors also were of different opinions, Dr. Ashworth taking the orthodox side of every question, and Mr. Clark, the sub-tutor, that of heresy, though always with the greatest modesty. Both of our tutors being young, at least as tutors, and some of the senior students excelling more than they could pretend to do in several branches of study, they indulged us in the greatest freedoms; so that our lectures had often the air of friendly conversations on the subjects to which they related." "In this situation," adds Dr. Priestly, very naturally, "I saw reason to embrace what is generally called the heterodox side of almost every question." He was assisted in arriving at these conclusions by the course of lectures, "containing no lectures on the Scriptures or on ecclesiastical history." He adds, "By the students in general, (and Mr. Alexander and myself were no exceptions,) commentators in general, and ecclesiastical history also, were held in contempt." It was in this situation, and so richly furnished, as he has described himself, with all the aids of erudition and instruction, that he "composed the first copy of his Institutes of Natural and Revealed religion," aided by the observations of his heretical friend Mr. Clark, a work which does credit to his deficiency "of lectures on the Scripture," and to his "contempt of commentators in general, and ecclesiastical history also."

It was at the academy that he exchanged an unqualified belief of the atonement for a "qualified belief" of it. But being now engaged in the work of the ministry, he thought it high time to commence the new and arduous task of "perusing the whole of the Old and New Testament." "The consequence of this was, a full persuasion that the doctrine of atonement, even in its most qualified sense, had no countenance either from Scripture or reason." But while he made this discovery, that the doctrine of the atonement was not contained in Scripture, he was at the same time satisfied, as might be expected, that the reasoning of St. Paul "was in many places far from being conclusive, and in a separate work I examined every passage in which his reasoning appeared to me to be defective or his conclusions ill supported, and I thought them to be pretty numerous." No wonder, just as if some Socinian geometer should deny that the doctrine of the three angles of a triangle being equal to two right angles was any where to be found in Euclid, and should discover in the same lucid moment, that Euclid was a very inconclusive and contemptible reasoner.

Having discovered that the Apostles were inconclusive reasoners, he could now easily help them to whatever conclusions he chose. He threw out doubts about the immateriality of the soul, "and I advanced my objections to the doctrine of the miraculous conception of Jesus, and his natural fallibility, and as a peccability," not objections to his natural fallibility,

as a reader might suppose, from the structure of this sentence of a writer, whose grammar (as Priestley himself remarks) gave David Hume his first insight into the niceties of the English language, but, on the contrary, arguments for his natural fallibility and peccability. It is not surprising that Priestley was told by some professed Atheist at Paris, "that I was the only person they had ever met with, of whose understanding they had any opinion, who professed to believe in Christianity."

His consolations on his death-bed were of a piece with his previous opinions. Good men among the Gentiles consoled themselves at least with the immediate prospect of Elysium; Dr. Priestley solaced himself with the thought that Hell was but a temporary purgatory, from which we should all escape sooner or later. "We shall all meet finally; we only require different degrees of discipline, suited to our different tempers, to prepare us for our final happiness."

All Dr. Priestley's canons of criticism are favourable for wide and liberal interpretation. "The language of the Scriptures is often highly figurative, which may account for the unknown source of evil being personified in them, so as to be called Satan in Hebrew, and Diabolus in Greek." "The fall of the Angels appears to me to be very problematical, and though it cannot be said that the thing is absolutely impossible, it seems upon the face of it to be very improbable." Many a doctrine is condemned by

Priestley, merely "on the face of it." Questions too are tried by the number of witnesses, not by their competence. Priestley rejects "a story," because "it is only found in one of the evangelists."

Sacrifices arose from "the notion that consumption by fire, was the manner in which God took things," and that the only way of offering a present to the Deity was to destroy it. Of the doctrine of the Trinity he makes short and easy work; "if it had been found there," that is, in the Scriptures, "it would have been impossible for a reasonable man to believe it, as it implies a contradiction which no miracles can prove;" hence, the Socinians might save themselves all trouble in wresting the Scriptures, and the Trinitarians might be left to themselves, since their great error consists in believing that which "it is impossible to believe." "The doctrine of Christ's having made the worlds, is not expressed by any of the Apostles in a manner so definite and clear, or so repeatedly, as its magnitude naturally requires." "It is not certainly from some casual expressions which so easily admit of other interpretations, and especially epistolary writings, which are seldom composed with so much care as books intended for the use of posterity, that we can be authorized to infer that such was the serious opinion of the Apostles. But if it had been their real opinion, it would not follow that it was true," a declaration which might supersede any discussion upon the subject.

As to the Fathers, though Priestley is fond of citing any thing from them which wears even a doubtful aspect towards his cause, he easily gets rid of their testimonies against him, by calling out loudly, "interpolation, which few writings of so early an age have escaped."

"It is even doubtful," Priestley says, "whether in some cases what are called Angels, and had the form of men, who even walked and spoke like men, were any thing more than temporary appearances, and no permanent beings, the mere organs of the Deity used for the purpose of making himself known and understood by his creatures."

Priestley was as great a Unitarian in philosophy as in religion; he was as much offended at the notion of two substances as of two Gods: "even when I first entered upon metaphysical inquiries, I thought that either the material or immaterial part of the universal system was superfluous." It mattered not which remained, provided only *one* was left. "If they say that upon my hypothesis there is no such thing as matter, and that every thing is spirit, I have no objection, provided they make as great a difference in spirits, as they have hitherto made in substances." The Deity himself must be material according to Priestley's philosophy, for "how an immaterial substance can act upon matter, is a difficulty which, in my idea, amounts to an absolute impossibility." Besides, if God is not extended, he "bears no relation to space, and, therefore, cannot

properly be said to exist any where." But as matter consists, according to Priestley, of nothing more than points and "powers of attraction and repulsion," the Deity of Priestley, being material, could only be a huge congeries of attracting and repelling points, so that, in strict reasoning, Priestley, far from upholding the unity of the Deity, deprived him of all unity whatsoever. Not content, however, with depriving his imaginary Deity of unity and spirituality, he makes him in express terms the author of sin; in this only does the God of Priestley differ from wicked men, that he commits sin (for he is the only agent, men are but machines) from a "good motive," and thus the end justifies the means. With this blasphemy, we conclude the self-drawn likeness or portrait of the chief and representative of the Socinians.

XI. The Latitudinarian divines, from the variety of their shades of difference, and from their being the offspring of our own times, or of the later ages that followed the reformation, excite more attention than perhaps they merit. They are insignificant, both in point of numbers and weight of talents, when compared with the sages and poets who established Polytheism, or with the philosophers and the priesthoods who diffused the emanative system, over so vast an extent of countries. Heterodoxy is transient as well as limited. It is for ever changing its form, and varying in the number of individuals that compose it, like the flowing stream, ever receiving

fresh accessions without any enlargement, and bearing, in its ceaseless progress, whatever enters its current, into the great receptacle of infidelity or indifference. Heterodoxy has no positive existence ; its whole being and action consist in the negation of the truth. It has no peculiar principles on which it rests, save the trite and ever-recurring sophism of reason being the judge of revelation. The absurdities of the Latitudinarian writers have been so well characterized in a variety of publications, and above all, in the work of Archbishop Magee, that little new can be said on the subject, till a new race of heretic writers arise, as fertile in blunders as their predecessors. It has been said, that the vigorous race of polemical divines, which the church of England so long armed and accomplished for spiritual warfare, had perished with Warburton and Horsley ; but there are giants still in the land, and no work has surpassed in vigour the admirable publication of Magee, in which he overwhelms with irresistible learning, argument, and derision, the sophisms of the self-entitled rational divines. Without noticing those egregious mistakes which have already been so fully commented on, we may merely remark, that no set of writers are so irrational as those divines who are so continually appealing to reason, and that, in trusting to their own understanding for their guide, they have been most miserably deceived. The conceited and rash spirit, which leads them astray in Christianity, exerts the same baneful influence over them in the discussion

of secular truth ; and shallow and preconceived opinion and partial induction are their constant companions, whether they turn their view to nature, or to the study of the mind. It is striking to see how the shallow and degrading tenets of Materialism seem to be allied to the last stages of the corruption of Christianity. At all times, the Socinians have been the friends and patrons of the theory of Epicurus, a system which sprung from Atheism, and which, strictly reasoned upon, and fully developed, leads back to Atheism again. In ethics an equally low, cold, and calculating tone is taken ; the noble incentives deduced by the Apostles from the deity and death of Christ, of course, must be discarded ; and an attempt is made to revive the morals of the Gentile philosophers, but which, deprived of the peculiar motives which gave them force and influence, fall spiritless and lifeless on the inattentive ear. Heterodoxy is but the dregs of what once was religion and knowledge. It savours of nothing generous, spirit-stirring, or ennobling. Socinianism is in no respect the heresy of genius ; it presents no views that can inform the understanding, enliven the imagination, or warm and elevate the heart. Of all such it seeks to deprive us, and, in return, would present us with nothing but a garbled religion and a beggarly philosophy.

XII. Rational theology is in every respect untenable ; it has no definite form, and it rests upon no foundation : the reason which it appeals to is a

counterfeit. It is merely ignorance and presumption under the disguise of reason. True reason is the disciple of revelation and of inductive philosophy ; it admits no tenets which are contrary to facts, or to truths divinely inspired. The spurious reasoning of the Socinians is contradicted alike by facts, and by Christianity ; the principles which it opposes are not only proclaimed by revelation, but displayed in the government of the world. The analogy between nature and grace, so ably set forth by Bishop Butler, is equally strong against the Socinians as against the Infidels. The principles of vicariousness and original sin everywhere present themselves in the constitution of the moral world ; and the Latitudinarian is opposing the information derived from the senses, as much as the inspired communications of the Bible, when he asserts, that these principles are contrary to the divine justice, and impossible to be believed.

The Bible is addressed to sinners ; and it is a want of a deep conviction of sin which chiefly prevents us from understanding its communications. The natural and carnal mind of man cannot discern spiritual things, for these must be spiritually discerned. Unless the Holy Ghost, with his own effectual and divine instruction, bring home the word of truth, which he once imparted to Prophets and Apostles, to each individual mind, not with new information, but with new energy, the truth will never be received in the love of it ; and if not received in the love of it, will

never be rightly apprehended, or even long retained. Inadequate notions of sin necessarily give inadequate notions of the atonement. The atonement being undervalued, the proper deity of Christ is naturally disallowed also. Each peculiar truth of Christianity is linked with all the rest, and they all stand or fall together.

But though the heart is the original cause of all departures from the faith, and the place where unbelief has its chief seat ; yet an intellectual process is also necessary, by which the peculiar doctrines of Christianity may be explained away, and by which an erroneous system of religion may be formed, more palatable to the corrupt inclinations of fallen man, than the uncompromising purity of the Gospel. The intellectual process by which a false religion is shaped out, is the very same by which a false system of philosophy is formed. In both cases our errors proceed from preconceived opinions, or partial induction. Genuine and inductive philosophy is the true cure of both. Let truth be impartially and universally sought ; let all dogmas founded upon ignorance, and the presumptuous conjectures of *a priori* reasoning, be discarded ; and proportioning our belief to the degree of evidence, which in every case is presented to us, false systems of divinity will disappear, with vain theories in philosophy, and we shall behold, with child-like and teachable minds, the wisdom of God manifest alike in his word and in his works.

While all other rational heresies rapidly fall into Socinianism, Socinianism itself, with still greater rapidity, terminates in Deism. And the cause of this is obvious. For if the sophism, that no doctrine can be admitted contrary to reason, authorizes us at pleasure to reject any one truth from the Scriptures, it leads us with much more consistency to cease from the garbling of particular texts, and to throw aside the whole Scriptures at once. It is evident at a glance, that the Scriptures are contrary to reason, falsely so called. They set at nought all the preconceived opinions of mankind. They exhibit the purity of the divine character in a light very different from the conjectures which those would form who had never been favoured by a divine revelation; and if whatever truths transcend our narrow intellect are to be rejected, the mere pruning away of this or that tenet is not sufficient; the whole Scriptures must be cast aside, as infinitely superior to the wisdom of man.

Infidel writers, while they acknowledge the Socinians as their near of kin, form a just estimate, both of their emendations of the Scripture, and of the ultimate result of all their labours. Speaking of the Latitudinarian divines of Geneva, the French *Encyclopedie* says, “*Ils expliquent le moins mal qu’ils peuvent les passages formels de l’Ecriture qui sont contraires à leur opinion*”——“*On se plaint moins à Genève qu’ailleurs des progrès de l’incrédulité; ce qui ne doit pas surprendre: la religion y est presque*

réduite à l'adoration d'un seul Dieu, du moins chez presque tout ce qui n'est pas peuple: le respect pour Jesus Christ et pour les Ecritures sont peut être la seule chose qui distingue d'un pur déisme, le Christianisme de Genève." * The only difference between the Deist and the Socinian, is placed by these accomplished infidels in the respect which the Socinians bear to the Scriptures and the Saviour. Now the Socinians believe the Saviour to be "fallible and peccable," and the Scriptures to be full of "inconclusive reasonings;" and if the difference between them is to be measured by the respect of the Socinians, and the reverence they bear to things sacred, it must be minute indeed. Accordingly the same writer elsewhere observes: "Du Socinianisme au Déisme il n'y a qu'une nuance très imperceptible."† And so slight and imaginary is the boundary between them, that the Socinians are continually passing over to Deism, without any one being able to say at what moment they ceased to be Socinians and became decidedly Deists.

* They explain, as well as they can, the express passages of Scripture which contradict their opinion.—They complain less at Geneva than elsewhere, of the progress of infidelity; a fact which ought not to cause surprise; for, religion is there almost reduced to the adoration of one God, at least with almost all but the populace: a respect for Jesus Christ and for the Scriptures is perhaps the only thing which distinguishes the Christianity of Geneva from pure Deism.

† From Socinianism to Deism, there is but a very imperceptible shade.

Thus one step of error leads to another, nor is there any rest to those who depart from the faith. Those who deny the absolute deity of Christ have only to be consistent in their opposition, and they will proceed without delay or cessation from Arianism to Socinianism. Nor does the downward path of error end here. They may indeed find more difficulty in giving up the name of Christianity than its truths; but the same impulse which before pressed them forwards, still urges them on. The regions of darkness lie open and interminable before them; they have only to continue admitting nothing contrary to their reason, and the divine government and the divine existence will appear to them encumbered with still greater absurdities than the revealed religion which they have left far behind; and they will arrive at the ultimate bourne to which their philosophic strength of mind is conducting them,—a grave without a resurrection, and a world without a God.

PART SIXTH.

INFIDELITY.

- I. Opposition between the present and the future—the visible and invisible.
- II. Practical Infidels many ; speculative few.
- III. Infidelity ; ancient and modern.
- IV. Spinoza, or Anti-supernatural Pantheism.
- V. Bayle, or Academic Doubts.
- VI. Hume, or Absolute Scepticism.
- VII. Voltaire, or Ridicule.
- VIII. Gibbon, or Historical Scepticism.
- IX. Rousseau, or sentimental Infidelity.
- X. Peculiar Argument for Christianity from Infidel Writings.
- XI. First source of Infidelity—the Corruption of the Heart.
- XII. Second source, the narrowness of the Understanding.
- XIII. Third source, the Imperfection of Knowledge.
- XIV. Proofs of Christianity permanent ; Objections varying.
- XV. Evidence of Christianity indebted to Unbelievers.
- XVI. Increase of Infidelity.
- XVII. Consequent Increase of Christianity.

PART VI.

INFIDELITY

I. MAN upon this earth is placed in a state of trial; and the essence of his probation consists in having to choose between a small present advantage, and a large future one; while by the constitution of his mind, that which is minute and present as powerfully affects his senses, as that which is great and remote does his understanding. Thus, to those who live by sense, and not by truth, the future is sacrificed to the present, in things which relate solely to this earthly and sensible life. Much greater are the temptations, when the advantages we pursue are invisible and future. Then, a gratification, within our immediate reach, though its pleasure be acknowledged to be base as well as perishing, assumes greater attractions to the eye of sense, than the solid and everduring happiness of heaven. Thus unbelief is natural to the animal and sensible life of man. We require no arguments to make us sceptical concerning futurity. We have only to neglect the evidences

upon which the importance of future and invisible advantages rest, and the fleeting and shadowy scene around us, displaces from our minds the thought of any more durable existence, and engrosses every care. On the contrary, it requires a perpetual effort of mind to overcome the true "Maya" or delusion of the finite intellect, the perpetual error that whatever is near to us is great and important, and that whatever is remote is also insignificant. The mind as well as the eye must be making continual allowance for the diminishing effects of distance, if it would enter into the true order and proportion of things.

II. Thus practical infidels are many. It is the besetting temptation of the human mind to care only for present and earthly things; to walk in a vain show and disquiet itself in vain, regardless of those unseen glories which are realized, even now, to the view of faith, and which, to the conviction of the most sensual and sceptical, eternity will speedily disclose. In the meantime, there are multitudes, who, though they verbally assent to the truths of Christianity, and would reject with disgust any arguments which were brought against them, are no more affected by them than if they were the veriest fables. They contrive, without the aid of infidelity, to live with a philosophic indifference to futurity. The things of time and sense occupy their minds entirely, and free them from every thought and every concern about the invisible, as completely, and even more so, than if they were masters of every sceptical

argument which has been adduced against Christianity from the days of Celsus to those of Voltaire. The infidels who were made so by reflection, when collected and embodied together from every age and country, shrink into nothing when compared with the multitudes, who, under the silent but effectual teaching of their fallen nature, have, without disputing or sophisms, taken this world as their portion, and have turned their backs on the gracious invitations of the gospel. Speculative infidels, though comparatively few, yet being more clamorous and busy, excite a much larger share of attention, than the multitudes whose silent denial is passed over almost unnoticed, and when infidels are mentioned, the mind naturally turns to the writers who have passed from the quiescent state of unbelief, to assail revelation with their arguments, or cover it with their ridicule.

Infidels may be divided into the ancient and modern, or those before and after the establishment of Popery. There is a great difference between them. Generally speaking, the ancient infidels admitted the miracles of the Saviour. The infidel Jews attributed them first to Beelzebub, afterwards to the possession of the secrets of the Cabala. The Gentiles, without rejecting the miracles of Jesus, excused themselves for not submitting to the Christian religion, by alleging the greater wonders said to have been wrought by Esculapius or other deities. The philosophers who opposed Christianity, sought to

disparage rather than invalidate the works performed by the Saviour, and attempted to depreciate them, in comparison with the marvellous stories, which were feigned of their ancient sages, and by discoursing of the supernatural powers that might be obtained by intercourse with the demons. Thus, the admissions of the earliest opponents of Christianity are sufficient to prove its truths to minds not bewildered by fables and superstition.

Not to mention the freedom from all religious belief, which a profane and vicious life often bestows, and which is not peculiar to any mode of worship, or to any age of the world ; infidelity, during the dark ages, sprung up from the corruptions of Popery on one hand, and from the learning of the Saracens on the other. It was easy to see that Popery was mere priestcraft ; and as many knew of no religion but Popery, they concluded by an easy error that religion was a mere invention of the priesthood. Those who went to study in Spain, imbibed more or less the tenets of their Arab teachers, who had thrown off the yoke of their own impostor, in order to submit more entirely to the authority of Aristotle, but who infused a portion of mystical devotion, without being themselves aware of the mixture, into the genuine Peripatetic doctrines. A tendency to infidelity arose also from some enthusiastic followers of Mysticism, who reasoned from their peculiar principles with more regard to strict logic, than to the authority of revelation. Aristotle and the church seemed firmly

united by the dexterity of the schoolmen ; but this league was broken by the devotion of several of his pupils, who gave more weight to the dictates of their master, than to the interpretations of his commentators. Astrology also contributed its share of unbelievers, who attributed the origin of all religions to the influence and position of the stars. But at the revival of letters, so great was the idolatrous respect for the ancients, as to lead men to worship their most absurd errors. Paganism, in departing from the south of Europe, had left behind an exact copy of itself in Popery ; but this seemed not enough to content the lovers of antiquity, who regretted the loss of the original idols of Rome, and who would gladly have exchanged the modern saints for the ancient heroes. Plato again was possessed of ardent disciples, who would cheerfully have put themselves to death to obtain a place in his philosophic elysium. As each system of ancient philosophy was revived by men too servile to invent, yet ambitious to distinguish themselves by a separate badge, the old errors respecting the Deity revived with the false systems respecting nature. Above all, Pantheism again struck its roots in Italy, supported by men of great genius, such as Cardan and Bruno, but whose credulity was almost unbounded, and whose dark fanaticism in favour of the errors they had adopted, often reached the verge of insanity. England afterwards was the country where Infidels flourished most in respect of numbers ; but nothing can be more weak and

miserable than many of their writings. Had they chosen any other subject than that of opposing Christianity, such writers as Blount, Morgan, and Tindal, would never have received the slightest notice ; and there are many others not much superior to them, who yet contrived to spread the utmost dismay among many well intentioned people, though now that the panic has subsided, it is no easy task to read their writings with any degree of attention. More lately, France has produced the greatest number of sceptical writers, and at one time they bore down all opposition before them. Every man who doubted that Christianity was an imposture was considered as a fool ; and a solitary exception was made in favour of Priestly, who was considered as the only person of sense who continued to retain some slender belief in revelation.

IV. Though infidel writers be numerous, those who are eminent amongst them are but few. The multitude borrow and repeat with sufficient credulity what their leaders have asserted. Sceptical authors, though a very miscellaneous collection of persons, may be nearly comprehended under the following classes ; Pantheists and Antisupernaturalists, whose guide from the truth is Spinoza ; Academic sceptics, whose chief authority is Bayle ; Absolute sceptics, amongst whom Hume is without comparison the first ; those who employ ridicule as the test of truth, amongst whom Voltaire stands unrivalled ; those who make history subservient to infidelity ; and here the

authority of Gibbon has the most weight : and lastly, those who reject Christianity as contrary to their internal sentiments of natural religion, to the support of which class the eloquence of Rousseau has chiefly contributed.

Spinoza, the leader of the first class, assumes the highest pretensions ; he talks of nothing less than demonstration, and of being infallibly led to each conclusion by arguments which admit of no reply, and, therefore, he judges it unnecessary to attend to the arguments of his opponents. Using, he says, a geometrical method of demonstration, it was not his custom to take the trouble of detecting the errors of other men. Of Bacon he had but a poor opinion, because he did not demonstrate every thing, like Spinoza himself, from the notion of absolute existence : “*confuse loquitur et fere nihil probat ; sed tantum narrat.*”^{*} Spinoza himself was utterly unconscious of the absurdities of Pantheism. He went on proving with perfect satisfaction that all things must be infinite, since, from an infinite cause, acting according to the infinity of its nature, infinite effects must necessarily flow. It seemed never to occur to him, that the existence of Baruch or Benedict Spinoza utterly overthrew his fine spun theory. According to his system, every thing ought to have been infinite and necessary, instead of every thing we behold

^{*} He speaks confusedly, and proves almost nothing ; he only relates.

being finite and arbitrary. Even, according to his own demonstration, there could have been no room for demonstration, for since all existence was infinite and eternal, there could only have been one infinite mind, and one infinite thought, the unbounded consciousness of unbounded existence, which, being the intuition of all truth, must have superseded every process or train of reasoning, and, amongst others, the pretended demonstrations of Spinoza.

Spinoza has not the gift of expressing his own tenets without being clumsy or confused. His affectation of mathematical accuracy, joined with a phraseology little superior to that of the schoolmen, though here and there he has a fine passage, leave to his writings little zest, except what they derive from their impiety. Hume, however, in his *Treatise upon Human Nature*, has given a very good summary, in a short compass, of Spinoza's philosophy, which is here subjoined. "A fundamental principle of the atheism of Spinoza is the doctrine of the simplicity of the universe, and the unity of that substance in which he supposes both thought and matter to inhere. There is only one substance, says he, in the world ; and that substance is perfectly simple and indivisible, and exists every where without any local presence. Whatever we discover externally by sensation, whatever we feel internally by reflection, all these are nothing but modifications of that one simple and necessarily existing being, and are not possessed of any separate or distinct existence. Every passion

of the soul, every configuration of matter, however different and various, inhere in the same substance, and preserve in themselves their character and distinction without communicating them to that subject in which they inhere. The same substratum, if I may so speak, supports the most different modifications without any difference in itself; and varies them without any variation. Neither time, nor place, nor all the diversity of nature, are able to produce any composition or change in its perfect simplicity and identity."

However Spinoza may boast of his demonstration, it is quite unnecessary to his purpose; his prudence secures the victory before the combat begins. Such is the amplitude of his definitions and axioms, that his cause is always gained before it is tried. "*Per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est et per se concipitur: hoc est id, cujus conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei a quo formari debeat.*"* We have only to admit this definition of substance, and there is no need of any further discussion; it contains in itself the essence of his philosophy.

The method of Spinoza is equally summary in purging the Scriptures of every inspired truth and miraculous fact. His definitions have generally the merit of taking for granted the conclusion he is about to demonstrate, thus making assurance doubly sure.

* By *substance*, I mean, that which exists in itself, and is produced by itself—that is to say, that whose production requires not the production of some other thing, from which it must be formed.

If the Hebrew word which signifies prophet can ever be translated an orator or a poet, then it is demonstrated, that the Hebrew prophets were simply the orators and the poets of their nation, and nothing more. If future events were prefigured under various images, then, of course, they merely imagined the visions they related. It is foolish to suppose that the being and attributes of God can be better discovered by the disorder than by the order of nature, therefore miracles can have no existence except in the fancy of the ignorant vulgar, who are more struck by an apparent anomaly than by the uniform tenor of eternal and unchangeable laws. The Hebrew verb has no tenses; and what we take for a prophecy of the future, may only have been a narrative of the past. The following objection has been so much admired, that it has been copied by numbers of infidel writers down to Tom Paine, who would willingly have passed it off for their own, and who scrupulously abstained from returning thanks to the donor. The Scriptures, observes Spinoza, are not autograph, for these books contain an account of the death of their supposed authors, and must have been written long after their decease, since it is found necessary to explain the customs and the events which they record. The obvious conclusion seems altogether to have escaped Spinoza and his followers; that, since one part of a sentence contains an allusion which the other part of the sentence is necessary to explain, these two parts could not be written at the same time,

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the first being evidently the original text, and the second being a subsequent comment, afterwards, for the sake of convenience, written along with it, and inserted into the body of the work.

In morals, Spinoza is as objectionable a guide as in religion. Strictly speaking, he allows of no morality at all. Right and power he considers as synonymous. In the state of nature men have a right to do whatever they have the power to do. Spinoza is as slavish in politics as he is immoral in ethics. He pronounces, that when men enter into society they make an unlimited transference, not only of a right to act for themselves, but even of the right to think for themselves, and place both alike at the disposal of their governors.

Such as the philosopher whom many of the German Transcendentalists look up to with admiration, and style him the first great idealist of modern times, who, without the aid of facts and experience, has deduced all his conclusions, *a priori*, from the bare consideration of absolute existence. Such praise is the severest censure, both on him who receives it and on those who give it. It shows an utter and incurable ignorance of true philosophy; it is in vain for such men that they live in the same world which Bacon and Newton illustrated with their writings and discoveries. Several of these admirers of Spinoza follow closely in the traces both of his Pantheism and his Anti-supernaturalism. With him they acknowledge no Deity but the universe; and

with him they hold the impossibility of miracles. They account for the miracles of Scripture in the same taste as Spinoza does, and in the same clumsy way; their explanations are more marvellous and unnatural than the wildest legends of Popery. They escape from believing what is above nature, only by believing what is contrary to sense.

In rational German theology all things are explained by thunder and lightning; the discourse of the German rabble is not more seasoned by these pithy expressions than the treatises of the German divines. If God is said to speak in the Bible, it is only a thunder storm growling at a distance. If our Saviour is taken up to heaven out of sight of his Apostles, it is a thunder cloud which suddenly surrounds him, and of which our Saviour takes advantage to retire from their view. If our first parents imagine they hear the voice of God in the garden, the same explanation still serves—it is “the sound of thunder heard remote.” And the meaning of Moses receiving the tables of stone from God on Mount Sinai, is merely that he took advantage of a thunder storm, which our learned informants tell us are not unfrequent in that part of the country. To make a slight variety in their solutions of supernatural difficulties, they sometimes introduce a volcano—thus when our first parents were driven out of Paradise by the cherubim with their flaming swords, it is ingeniously conjectured that a volcano had suddenly burst forth, and that by the flaming sword we

may understand a stream of lava. To the impiety of many of these conjectures, Spinoza would have had no objection, but he would scarcely have tolerated their folly. His own poor shifts in attempting to explain away miracles are wretched enough ; still they are far superior to those of his disciples.

Michaelis, though far removed above the Anti-supernaturalists, who succeeded him in Germany, is yet very faulty in the light manner in which he often treats the word of God. When he was engaged in writing notes on Lowth's Hebrew poetry, it was told him that Lowth was dead. This interesting intelligence he was in haste to communicate to his readers, accompanied with some freer criticisms than he would have ventured upon had he known that Lowth was still alive. Being informed of his mistake, he hastened to excuse himself to Lowth, and says he would have used much milder expressions had he conceived that they would have ever come before the eyes of the person he was criticising, and that he would not have spoken with that abrupt brevity with which it is usual to oppose the opinions of the dead. It would have been well for Michaelis had he spoken with the same caution concerning the Most High, and treated with equal respect and tenderness the words of the ever-living God. But, in his writings, we see the beginning of the thunder and lightning hypothesis. The cherubs, according to him, were nothing but the horses which drove the thundering chariot of Jehovah, and whenever they

are mentioned, we must expect an allusion to thunder and lightning. Many other parts of the Scriptures he disfigures by attempts at inapplicable learning. He translates the wings of the morning, the wings of Aurora, and then wonders at a coincidence wholly of his own making, and he is still further surprised that the Orientals should only give Aurora wings, when the western poets had furnished her with a chariot. In the following verse of Job, "He is swift as the waters, their portion is cursed in the earth, he beholdeth not the way of the vineyards," Michaelis sees a plain and palpable allusion to the Grecian fables of Tartarus and the Elysian fields; He is swift as the waters evidently signifies, He is swiftly carried over the water of Styx in Charon's boat. "*Celerrimè cimbâ vehuntur Acherontiâ.*" And he beholdeth not the way of the vineyards, means he shall have no entrance into the garden of Elysium.

In the hands of such commentators, the Scriptures may easily be made to bear any sense. It is also amusing to see how the frequency of absurdity diminishes the consciousness of it. Nothing is too ridiculous for the credulity of these Neologians, who are ready to admit of any thing except the inspiration of the Bible. But the reign of absurdity and error cannot be perpetual in any country; there is a continual progress in human affairs, however some nations may appear to be returning to the barbarism of ancient errors. The true system of the Bible,

and of nature, must every where prevail at last, and the great difficulty then will be, to believe that the opinions of the Pantheists and Neologists of Germany entitled their holders, not to a place in Bedlam, but to the applause of their countrymen, and to the chairs of philosophy and divinity.

V. The academic scepticism, which the genius of Bayle revived, and made popular in modern times, is fast passing away, if not altogether extinct. Nor is it likely ever to be restored by any such favourable train of circumstances, as have given a new influence to the doctrines of Spinoza in Germany. To excel in it would demand great labour and considerable ingenuity. Its essence consists in opposing all the systems of speculative belief to each other. But these speculative systems have entirely lost their interest. The difficulty is not to refute them, but to present them in any form which would attract the least attention. The academic philosophy is much more suitable to the genius of ancient than of modern times, and more fitted for the infancy of the understanding than for the present more advanced period, when many important discoveries have been ascertained, and the strength of men's faculties have been successfully tried in explaining several of the mysteries of nature.

There is a radical absurdity in academic doubt and research, which is ever seeking for the avowed purpose of never finding ; and which is perpetually reasoning, in order that it may never come to any

conclusion. The great temptation to adopt the academic philosophy was the great quantity of the ready-formed materials which the sceptic found prepared to his hand. Before the academy existed, the various theories of philosophy were all at war with each other, and had clearly proved that, if they were weak for defence, they were strong for attack. The academic had only to inflame the combat which was already begun, and to take care that it should never be terminated by bringing prompt assistance to the weaker party. The first academies were, no doubt, the Sophists, whose vocation and boast it was, to display their skill in defending both sides of the question. Socrates, in attacking the Sophists, did not disdain occasionally to use their own weapons ; and the Socratic doubt, though intended to recall men from vain speculations, has unwittingly given its rise and its peculiar colour to the scepticism of the academy. This scepticism was peculiarly adapted to the genius of the Greeks ; it was alike fitted to display their eloquence and their intelligence. Cicero has shown of what advantage it was to oratory ; and, in its moderate indulgence, it was to the understandings of the Greeks what the gymnastic exercises were to their bodies. In naming Cicero, one cannot help reflecting how superior he was to Bayle, not only in genius and eloquence, in which, of course, there can be no comparison, but in the mode in which he pursued the academic system. While Bayle is taken up too often with a warfare of petty details, and cavilling about some

obscure fact, or disputing about the consequences of some insignificant opinion, Cicero is entering into the spirit of every ancient system, and shows that he understands their strength as well as their weakness before he brings them to mutual combat, and weighs in the balance of academic suspense their conflicting opinions. Cicero adopted the academic philosophy for a suitable end ; Bayle for none that he chose to avow. Cicero aimed at improving his eloquence by the abundance of topics which the study afforded him, and his purpose was to bind himself, by his academic profession, to understand all the theories of Greece, and to wield them at his will. Bayle, while he seems to have no other object than to keep the understanding in suspense, with an impartial indifference to all opinions, is manifestly aiming his blows at natural and revealed religion. His favourite topic, which occupies so disproportioned a space in his pages, is the prevalence of evil, and the impossibility that this world, constituted as it is, could either be created or governed by a good Deity. He is also well aware that the only practical end of scepticism is to reject Christianity. Men neither eat nor drink the less on account of the arguments of the Sceptic. On the contrary, the vanities of life are pursued with still more avidity, the more doubtful our prospects of immortality. When reason is set at war with itself, the only effect is to give freer scope to the lower propensities of our nature. If all things be so doubtful, this conclusion at least remains certain, "Let

us eat and drink to-day, for to-morrow we die." Bayle was sensible that his scepticism could only affect religion. "C'est avec raison qu'on déteste le Pyrrhonisme dans les écoles de théologie. C'est par rapport à cette divine science que le Pyrrhonisme est dangereux; car on ne voit pas qu'il le soit guere ni par rapport à la physique, ni pas rapport à l'état.—La vie civile n'a rien à craindre de cet esprit là; car les Sceptiques ne nioient pas qu'il ne se fallût conformer aux contumes de son pays, et pratiquer les devoirs de la morale, et prendre parti en ces choses là sur des probabilités, sans attendre la certitude.—Il n'y a donc que la religion qui ait à craindre le Pyrrhonisme."* Yet this exception of religion is founded not upon reason, but upon the alienation of the mind from God. If we ought to act upon probabilities in the affairs of this life, where, after all, little is to be gained or lost, much more ought we to act upon probabilities "without expecting certainty," (if it is not to be found in things which regard the life to come,) where our all is at stake. If men regard the flimsy sophisms of the Sceptics, only so far as to neglect their heavenly interests, while they

* It is with good reason that Pyrrhonism (universal scepticism,) is strongly condemned in the schools of theology. It is only in regard to this divine science that Pyrrhonism is dangerous; we can see that it can hardly become so, with regard to natural science or to civil duties. The state has nothing to fear from this spirit; for Sceptics do not deny, that we must conform to the customs of our country, and practise the duties of morality, and act in common affairs upon probabilities, without expecting certainty.—Only religion therefore has any reason to fear Pyrrhonism.

move not one step the less for all the arguments against motion which Bayle and other Sceptics have heaped together, it is evident that, though they are wise in the affairs of this fleeting life, a deceived heart has deprived them of understanding in the concerns of that life which is future and unending.

Much has been said of the innocence and purity both of the life of Bayle, and of other infidels, with as much justice as a confirmed miser might be praised for his habitual temperance. They had no time for gross and vulgar vices ; their lives were expended in weighing and studying the thoughts of other men, in undermining, as they conceived, the foundations of Christianity, and establishing their own reputation upon its ruins. But if they were free from vicious actions, they were not free from vicious thoughts. Their polluted pages, contaminating the mind of the unwary reader, will bear witness against them to the end of time, and at the day of final retribution.

VI. If Bayle is remarkable for the vast variety of his reading, and the minute and subtle casuistry by which he makes it all turn to the profit of scepticism, Hume is still more eminent for striking at the root of all opinions, and for appearing to found a system of absolute Pyrrhonism in the nature of the human understanding itself. Hume is certainly the great and unrivalled Sceptic of modern times, nor even throughout antiquity would it be possible to find his equal in acuteness. His writings must always be an object

of great interest to every one, who even in remote ages shall make the history of speculative opinions his study. He has given their death wound to the theories of his predecessors, and his scepticism is the point of departure, from which the more modern systems commence their course. The philosophy of Kant is an attempt to outflank the scepticism of Hume by ascending to higher ground, while the same scepticism gave rise to Reid's Inquiry into the Mind upon the principles of inductive discovery.

As a writer of genius, Hume deserves the highest regard, less indeed for what he has done himself than what he has been the means of stirring up others to do. But he has many disciples whose blind admiration is paid to his infidelity rather than to his genius, who have the folly to follow him, where he is only making a feint of leading them, and the credulity to believe whatever he advances, without inquiring what were his real opinions. These servile admirers are not aware that Hume has both an inner and an outer doctrine. His real opinions are contained in his earliest work—his *Treatise of Human Nature*. In his *Essays*, the extent of his scepticism is concealed, and is made to bear against particular objects instead of appearing to undermine, as it actually does, the whole fabric of knowledge. His system has been admirably denominated by Kant, *Phenomenism*. His scepticism is the extension of the acute remark of Berkely, that no external or material object can have any resemblance to a thought,

and deducing from this, that a material world (such as it is generally supposed) is an impossibility. The same line of reasoning may be extended both to the existence of the Deity and of our own souls ; there remains nothing, therefore, but thoughts or ideas, and their various changes and combinations. God is an idea, matter is an idea, the soul is an idea, space is but an idea ; the belief of its existence involves numberless absurdities. Time, it is equally evident, is but an idea also. Reasoning is only the comparison of ideas. "All kinds of reasoning consist of nothing but a comparison." Causation is also only a relation of ideas ; it is merely the perpetual priority of one idea to another. Belief consists merely in the liveliness of our ideas : thus a Theist has that idea, which we call God, in a lively manner, and therefore believes in it ; the Atheist, on the other hand, has but a faint idea of the Deity, and therefore denies the divine existence. Again, Hume says, "all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation ; 'tis not solely in poetry and music we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in our philosophy." Thus when a man has a turn for paradoxical reasoning, it only shows that he has a turn for an odd "species of sensation." Hume does justice to his own views when he calls his notion about causation "the most violent of all the paradoxes which I have had, or shall hereafter have occasion to advance in the course of this treatise." According to Hume, the only true philosophy of man is also the philosophy

of beasts, and upon this latter point he lays a great stress. "Now, let any philosopher," says Hume, "make a trial, and endeavour to explain, that act of the mind, which we call belief, and give an account of the principles from which it is derived, independent of the influence of custom on the imagination, and let his hypothesis be equally applicable to beasts, as to the human species ; and, after he has done this, I promise to embrace his opinion. But, at the same time, I demand, as an equitable condition, that if my system be the only one which can answer to all these terms," (that is, if it be equally applicable to beasts as to the human species,) "it may be received as entirely satisfactory and convincing." But how any thing can be received as entirely satisfactory, demands an explanation which cannot easily be given, for Hume has an ingenious method of annihilating at last the greatest certainty, merely by the repetition of doubts. "Having found in every probability, besides the original uncertainty inherent in the subject, a new uncertainty derived from the weakness of that faculty which judges ; and having adjusted these two together, we are obliged by our reason to add a new doubt derived from the possibility of error, in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties. This is a doubt, which immediately occurs to us, and of which, if we would closely pursue our reason, we cannot avoid giving a decision. But this decision, though it should be favourable to our preceding judgment, being founded only on probability,

must weaken still further our first evidence, and must itself be weakened by a fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on *in infinitum* ; till at last there remain nothing of the original probability, however great we may suppose it to have been, and however small the diminution by every new uncertainty. No finite object can subsist under a decrease repeated *in infinitum*, and even the vastest quantity which can enter into human imagination must in this manner be reduced to nothing. Let our first belief be never so strong, it must infallibly perish, by passing through so many new examinations, of which each diminishes somewhat of its force and vigour." Notwithstanding the power of doubts upon doubts, we may boldly affirm, without fear of contradiction, that the above passage contains the quintessence of scepticism ; the art of doubting can no further go. It is to be lamented, however, that while philosophy is thus favourable to scepticism, nature is equally partial to dogmatism, and " by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge, as well as to breathe and feel."—" Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavoured by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and rendered unavoidable." Yet, in another place, Hume says, " This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady which can never be radically cured, but must return upon

us every moment, however we may chase it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. 'Tis impossible, upon any system, to defend either our understanding or senses ; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always increases the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and inattention alone can afford us any remedy ; for this reason I rely entirely upon them, and take it for granted, whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence, he will be persuaded there is both an external and internal world." This opinion, however, he shortly after recants. "I said that reflections very refined and metaphysical have little or no influence upon us. This opinion, I can scarce forbear retracting and condemning from my present feeling and experience. The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I or what ? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return ? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread ? What beings surround me, and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me ? I am confounded with all these ques-

tions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty. Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation and lively impression of my senses, which obliterates all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse and am merry with my friends ; and when, after three or four hour's amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further."

Thus, in the philosophy of Hume, in its original and genuine form, nothing can be alleged against Christianity more than against that system of common sense, by which the affairs of the present world are conducted, and which even the Sceptics themselves allow that it would be insanity to disregard. Hume's philosophy is absolute scepticism, which destroys every opinion. Truth is but belief, and belief is merely a sensation. But he never proposed to abide by his own conclusions in the affairs of this life. All that he could possibly aim at, as the only practical result of his scepticism, was to be delivered from the anxious thoughts of that futurity which Christianity presents, and to be entitled upon philo-

sophical principles to "deem himself unworthy of immortal life." Disappointed in the expected success of his first work, he disguised his principles in the second, and made them more palatable to the popular taste. In his treatise he had expressed his opinion that "no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours." But in his essays, he speaks more despondingly of the fortune of abtruse speculations, and trusts for fame to a more popular philosophy. Hence, much of his system in his latter work is thrown into the shade. The tone of absolute scepticism is discarded. Mathematics are no longer represented as a science which comes far short of certainty. In his former work, he had said, "When geometry decides any thing concerning the proportions of quantity, we ought not to look for the utmost precision and exactness. None of its proofs extend so far; it takes the dimensions and proportions of figures justly, but roughly, and with some difficulty; its errors are never considerable, nor would it err at all, did it not aspire to such an absolute perfection." But ignorance and scepticism, when applied to mathematics, are not treated with the same indulgence as they are when directed against religion. In the essays, mathematics were suffered to rest in peace, and the exact sciences were even treated with some degree of respect. In return, the essays were more unfavourable to religion than the former work; the warfare which had been waged against all opinions

was now concentrated into a decided hostility, not only against revealed, but also against natural religion. Instead of metaphysical subtleties and paradoxes, which created little interest, the public were furnished with an essay against the possibility of miracles, and another against belief of a just and retributive Deity. Now, Hume's opinions had undergone no change except as to the sort of writings which suited the public taste. His philosophy was still Phenomenism, it admitted of no other existence discernible to us than our own thoughts, no other laws except the order which our thoughts observe, and no other nature than the appearance of these ideas themselves. His Essay on miracles is therefore a mere mystification. A miracle, according to Hume, is a violation of the laws of nature, but according to Hume's inner doctrine, there is no external world, and nature can have no existence, and that which has no existence can have no laws. What are called miracles must be merely interruptions in the usual order of our ideas ; all miracles, according to Hume, must be merely subjective, seeing there is no objective or external world. To prove that there can be no miracles, is merely to prove that no miracles can be believed, since, by Hume's exclusion, all truth is subjective, or relates merely to the order of ideas themselves. But the belief in miracles is implied in the argument against them, and therefore that argument is suicidal, and carries its own refutation along with it.

But, independent of the *reductio ad absurdum* which Hume's own philosophy affords against his favourite argument, and which is undermined by the very system from which it springs, it may be observed that it contains within itself a complication of blunders, more numerous, perhaps, than ever were crowded into the same brief space. The argument of Hume against miracles is as follows. A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, but we learn from experience that the laws of nature are never violated. Our only accounts of miracles depend upon testimony, and our belief in testimony itself depends upon experience. But experience shows that testimony is sometimes true and sometimes false ; therefore we have only a *variable* experience in favour of testimony. But we have a *uniform* experience in favour of the uninterrupted course of nature. Therefore as on the side of miracles there is but a variable experience, and on the side of no miracles a uniform experience, it is clear that the lower degree of evidence must yield to the higher degree, and therefore no testimony can prove a miracle to be true.

Every one who has attacked this sophistry has pointed out a new flaw in it, and they are scarcely yet exhausted. Paley showed that it was necessary to demonstrate that there was no God, previously to demonstrating that there could be no miracles. Campbell showed that so far from belief in testimony being founded on experience alone, that it was diffidence in testimony that we acquire by experience.

Others have pointed out the sophism in the double use of the word experience, and the confusing of the experience of a particular individual with the universal experience of mankind; for, to assert that miracles are contrary to experience in the last sense, is most pitifully to beg the question. Others have observed upon the complete misapprehension of the argument of Tillotson, and upon the sophism in the use of the word "contrary," for as it is a begging of the question to say that miracles are contrary to the experience of mankind, so it is a sophism to say that they are contrary to the experience of Mr. Hume himself, unless he had been personally present at the time and place, when and where all the miracles recorded in the Bible are said to have been wrought, from the days of Moses to the time of our Saviour. Our experience, so far from being contrary to miracles, is decidedly in favour of them. Both our reason and our experience are altogether in favour of the veracity of testimony, where there is no motive to deceive, and no possibility of being deceived. Such was the case with the Apostles. Their personal experience, and that of many others, is invincibly in favour of miracles. There is no experience—no, not even of a single individual, against miracles. No one was ever placed in the situation where miracles might be reasonably expected, to whom miracles were not vouchsafed. Thus, so far from miracles being contrary to experience, the whole range of the expe-

rience we possess is altogether, and without one solitary exception, in favour of miracles.

But to take entirely new ground, miracles, philosophically speaking, are not violations of the laws of nature. The miracles of the Bible, which are the only true miracles, so far from being violations of nature, are as natural as the lifting up a stone from the ground, or impelling a vessel along the waves by the stroke of an oar. None would call it a violation of the laws of nature when human agents set a body in motion which was previously at rest, and which would have remained at rest without their interference ; still less can it be called a violation of the laws of nature when the Divine Agent, who is the lawgiver of nature, impresses an additional force upon creation, and gives a new direction to its movements. But it would be endless to go over all the variety of mistakes which are involved in the sophistry against miracles, and to point out the many vulgar and unphilosophical notions which are implied in Hume's reasonings, both concerning "nature" and her "inviolable laws."

We have seen how Hume could make his philosophy bend to a particular purpose, and could talk of nature as if it were something different from the evanescent train of ideas which are continually fleeting through the mind. It only remains to observe, that he can use the same liberty with history as with philosophy, and can accommodate facts as well as reasonings to serve a present purpose. "Our conversation," Hume says, "began with my admiring

the singular good fortune of philosophy, which, as it requires entire liberty above all other privileges, and chiefly flourishes from the free opposition of sentiments and argumentations, received its birth in an age and country of freedom and toleration, and was never cramped, even in its most extravagant principles, by any creeds, confessions, or penal statutes. For, except the banishment of Protagoras and the death of Socrates, which last event proceeded partly from other motives, there are scarcely any instances to be met with in ancient history, of this bigoted jealousy with which the present age is so much infested." A statement more contrary to facts can scarcely be conceived. Hume himself was conscious that it was so, even while he was writing it. We have his own words for it. "It is a vulgar error," says Hume. "to imagine that the ancients were as great friends to toleration as the English or the Dutch are at present." Did Mr. Hume forget, for he could scarcely be ignorant, when he mentioned Protagoras and Socrates as almost the only objects of persecution—that Anaxagoras, the first philosopher who established himself at Athens, would have been put to death, but for the intercession of Pericles, and all that Pericles, in general all powerful with the Democracy, could obtain for his friend was, that the sentence of death should be changed into that of perpetual banishment. That the disciples of Socrates, after his death, judged it unsafe to remain at Athens, and that ever afterwards they disguised their opinions when these differed

at all from the customs of the country. That Aristotle, in spite of this prudent reserve, was obliged to quit Athens, and that in the time of his disciple, Theophrastus, all the philosophers left that city upon a decree, which forbade any school of philosophy being opened without special leave being granted by the government, under pain of death. Lastly, that the Athenians raised a pillar of brass, with an inscription upon it, proclaiming a reward of one talent to any who should kill Diagoras, and two talents to the man who should bring him alive. Truly, the belief in ancient liberality is a vulgar error indeed. The Athenian notion of toleration is well described by Socrates, and much resembles the opinion upon that subject that many entertain even in our own times. It appears to me, says Socrates, that the Athenians do not greatly care what sentiments a man holds, provided he keeps them to himself, but if he attempts to instruct others, then they are indignant.

VII. Few works have been more serviceable to infidelity than Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*, because it contains no philosophy, but is a mere series of doubting and jesting from beginning to end. It is difficult to conceive the extent of ignorance which it shows upon every subject of which it treats, in geography, history, and statistics, theology, criticism, and taste. He boldly offers to demonstrate that a deluge is impossible, and the only two things which he takes for granted are, that the land and the sea occupy an equal space upon the globe, and that the ocean, upon

an average, is only five hundred feet deep. As such ignorance is scarcely credible, we shall subjoin his own words. “*Toutes les mers couvrent la moitié du globe ; en prenant une mesure commune de leur profondeur vers les rivages, et en haute mer, on compte cinq cents pieds.*” * And to obviate any arguments from a deluge that are brought from the appearance of shells imbedded upon mountainous regions, he modestly suggests that they might have been left there by the pilgrims going to Rome. “*Est-ce d’ailleurs une idée tout à fait romanesque de faire reflexion à la foule innombrable de pèlerins qui partaient à pied de St. Jacques en Galice, et de toutes les provinces, pour aller à Rome par le mont Cenis, chargés de coquilles à leurs bonnets ?*” † What weight his arguments against the populousness of the ancient Jews ought to have is apparent from his estimating the modern Jews at only four hundred thousand. “*Nos critiques insistent, et disent qu’il n’y a pas aujourd’hui sur la surface de la terre quatre cent mille Juifs.*” ‡ But in proportion as he diminishes the

* The seas cover half of the globe : taking the mean of their depth, near the shores and in the deep sea, it is reckoned at five hundred feet.

† Is it an extravagant idea, considering the immense crowd of pilgrims, that went on foot, from St. Jacques in Galicia, and all the provinces, to Rome, by the way of Mount Cenis, bearing shells in their caps ?

* Our critics insist and say, that there are not now in all the earth four hundred thousand Jews.

number of the Jews, he increases that of the human race at present existing, by at least eight hundred millions. "S'il y a environ seize cent millions d'hommes sur la terre, comme quelques doctes le prétendent."* In both these cases he shifts the responsibility of these enumerations upon imaginary critics and learned men, but is at the same time evidently unconscious of their utter absurdity.

The intelligence with which Voltaire studied the Scriptures is well exemplified in the following passage from Dr. Priestley's works. "M. Voltaire, in more than one of his pieces, represents the Jews as cannibals, and pretends to prove from Ezekiel xxxix. 17, that God encourages them with the promise of feeding on the flesh of their enemies. But if he had read so much as the verse preceding, he must have seen that the whole passage was a fine apostrophe addressed to the birds and beasts of prey, and was intended to express, in a very emphatical manner, a very great overthrow of the enemies of the Jews. "When afterwards," continues Priestley, "this author acknowledges his mistake, as he does in a postscript to the above mentioned treatise, he says, by way of apology for it, but contrary to all common sense, that two of the verses which I have recited might have been addressed to the Jews as well as to the birds and beasts. What can we think of the fairness and com-

* If there are about sixteen millions of men on the earth, as some learned men assume.

petency of judgment in this most distinguished of modern unbelievers, when he is capable of writing in this very absurd and unguarded manner?"

Voltaire's remarks go as far against natural religion as against revealed. "La philosophie nous apprend que cet univers doit avoir été arrangé par un être incompréhensible, éternel, existant par sa nature ; mais encore une fois, la philosophie ne nous apprend pas les attributs de cette nature. Nous savons ce qu'il n'est pas, et non ce qu'il est." "Justice humaine, bonté humaine, sagesse humaine, rien de tout cela ne lui peut convenir. On a beau étendre à l'infini ces qualités, ce ne seront jamais que des qualités humaines dont nous reculons les bornes."* Thus Voltaire, though professedly opposed to Atheism, had he reasoned correctly upon his own principles, must have denied the existence of a Deity, for, to give the name of Deity to an unknown something, stripped of all conceivable attributes, is certainly not Theism ; but whatever his notion of that Deity might be, it signified little, while he took away all the moral relations between man and any superior power. "Ce n'est qu'envers l'homme que l'homme peut être coupable.

* Philosophy teaches us, that this universe must have been framed by a Being, incomprehensible, eternal, existing by his own nature : but nevertheless, philosophy does not teach us the attributes of that nature. We know what he is not, and not what he is.—Human justice, human goodness, human wisdom,—nothing of all these can belong to him. Although we extend these qualities to infinity, they will be still only human qualities, of which we have taken away the limits.

Un voleur du grand chemin ne saurait voler Dieu
Qu'importe a l'être eternal qu'un peu de métal jaune
soit entre les mains de Jérôme ou de Bonaventure ?”*

But while he took away all reality from religion, and all hopes of another life, the picture which he gives of human prospects in this life is by no means inviting. “Combien trouve-t-on de ces vieillards qu'on appelle heureux, dont le bonheur consiste à ne pouvoir jouir d'aucun plaisir de la vie, à n'en faire, qu'avec peine, deux ou trois fonctions dégoûtantes, à ne distinguer ni les sons ni les couleurs, à ne connaître ni jouissance ni espérance, et dont toute la félicité est de savoir confusément qu'ils sont un fardeau de la terre, baptisés ou circoncis depuis cent années !” †

It is chiefly, however, on the score of taste that he attacks revealed religion, and he judges of the Bible, and of all ancient poetry, according to the rules of criticism prevalent at Paris, and among the French, the most anti-poetical of the nations. Talking of some of the higher flights of poetry, he says,

* It is only towards man that man can be blame-worthy. A robber on the highway cannot rob God. What does it concern the eternal Being whether a little yellow metal is in the hands of *Jerome* or of *Bonaventure*?

† How many there are to be found of those old men who are called happy, whose happiness consists in not being able to enjoy any pleasure of life, in performing only with pain two or three disgusting functions; in distinguishing neither sounds nor colours; in knowing neither joy nor hope; and all whose felicity arises from a confused knowledge that they are a burden of the earth, baptized or circumcised a hundred years ago!

"Il est très certain que les Français ne souffriraient point de pareilles libertés."* Corneille is rated by him as at least equal to Homer: "Le grand Corneille, génie pour le moins égal a Homère."† Respecting himself, though he has no doubts that he himself is an epic poet, yet he leaves to posterity to determine what degree of precedency he is to have among his epic brethren.

"Après Milton, après le Tasse,
Parler de moi serait trop fort;
Et j'attendrai que je sois mort,
Pour apprendre quelle est ma place."‡

Judging of works of genius, as he did, it is not wonderful that the sublimities of the Bible appeared to him absurdities, and can only apply to him his own remark upon another writer: "Quel malheureux don de la nature que l'esprit, s'il a empêché M. de Voltaire de sentir ces grandes beautés d'imagination."§ After all, we may easily lay too much stress upon what Voltaire's opinions were, for he frankly confesses himself, that rather than be tied down to the same opinions, whether true or false, he would

* It is very certain that the French would not allow such liberties.

† The great Corneille, a genius at least equal to Homer.

‡ After having named Milton and Tasso, it would be too bold to speak of myself; and I will wait till I am dead, to learn what my place is.

§ How unhappy a gift of nature is wit, if it prevented Voltaire from perceiving these highest beauties of the imagination!

think it better never to have been born. “Un homme de bons sens, dit on, doit toujours penser de la même façon : si on en était réduit là, il vaudrait mieux n’être pas né.”*

VIII. The most dangerous work that could possibly be written against religion, would be an historical narrative, relating to the times and circumstances with which religion is chiefly concerned, preserving an outward regard to morals, but misrepresenting with a delicate and perpetual irony the miraculous history of the Bible, and taking care, without absolutely falsifying facts, to place it in an absurd and improbable point of view. The history of Gibbon, though it does not come up entirely to the standard of infidel perfection, is yet perhaps the most dangerous production which has yet appeared, and the work against Christianity which least admits of a reply. For who, as Paley observes, “can refute a sneer?” Gibbon’s history deals very much in insinuation, and very little in argument. It is not so much what is actually said, as what the sagacious reader perceives, is intended to be said, that carries conviction along with it, and lays prostrate before it the creeds of many centuries and nations. As much error is employed in a single line as would require a pamphlet to refute and place in its just point of view, while the patient follower of truth has,

* A man of good sense, it is said, ought always to retain the same opinions : if we are to be reduced to that, it were better not to have been born.

after much weariness, both to himself and his readers, disentangled some wilfully perplexed knot of controversy and difficulty—he sees the light and careless Sceptic far before him, scattering the minute seed of more errors in a day, than he will be able to extirpate in a year.

Unless we were to reckon the alleged improbabilities and absurdities which are every where rather insinuated than openly urged against Christianity, throughout the pages of Gibbon, there appear to be only two classes of objections which are distinctly brought forward; the first aims to prove that Christianity cannot be true on account of the vices and follies of professing Christians, and the second class of arguments contends that Christianity owes its rapid diffusion in the early ages to natural and assignable causes. With respect to the first class of his objections, Gibbon has taken the trouble to refute them himself. “The scandal of the pious Christian, and the fallacious triumph of the infidel should cease, as soon as they recollect not only *by whom*, but likewise *to whom* the divine revelation was given. The theologian may indulge the pleasing task of describing religion as she descended from heaven arrayed in her native purity. A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption, which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings.” The above observation, though written with a sneer, is not the

less true, and it overturns nine-tenths of the arguments, if they may be called so, which Gibbon has directed against Christianity. The vices of professing Christians, it is evident, can in no wise affect the evidences of Christianity ; they only prove that those who are guilty of them are not the disciples of a religion which inculcates upon its followers the utmost purity both of life and thought. All the sarcasms of Gibbon, therefore, have not the least tendency to decide whether Christianity is true or not ; they merely affect the characters of a number of individuals. To these individuals, Gibbon has dealt most unjustly. He himself 'is ready to own that the virtues of the primitive Christians were great, when the admission served his purpose of showing that Christianity owed a considerable part of its rapid progress to natural means. " When the Christians of Bithynia were brought before the tribunal of the younger Pliny, they assured the proconsul that, far from being engaged in any unlawful conspiracy, they were bound by a solemn obligation to abstain from the commission of those crimes which disturb the private or public peace of society, from theft, robbery, adultery, perjury, and fraud. Near a century afterwards, Tertullian, with an honest pride, could boast that very few Christians had suffered by the hand of the executioner, except on account of their religion. Their serious and sequestered life, averse to the gay luxury of the age, inured them to chastity, temperance, economy, and all the sober and do

mestic virtues. As the greater number was of some trade or profession, it was incumbent on them, by the strictest integrity, and the fairest dealing, to remove the suspicions which the profane are apt to conceive against the appearance of sanctity. The contempt of the world exercised them in the habits of humility, meekness, and patience. The more they were persecuted, the more closely they adhered to each other. Their mutual charity and unsuspecting confidence has been remarked by infidels, and was too often abused by perfidious friends."

The attempt to assail the divine origin of Christianity by assigning natural causes, to account in part for its rapid progress, seems founded on very superficial views. Whoever believes God to have been the author of Christianity, of course must also believe that Christianity was adapted to the faculties and the hopes of the human soul, and that a preparation was made by Providence for its entrance into the world, so that both the mind of man, and the circumstances of the world's affairs, were ready for its reception. Had Gibbon, therefore, proved that Christianity was greatly favoured by the causes which he assigned, he would have proved nothing to the purposes of infidelity. It is a matter, therefore, merely of curiosity, and of no consequence to the evidences of Christianity, to remark, that several of Gibbon's causes are inadequate to the effects assigned to them.

His first cause is "the inflexible, and if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Chris-

tians." Now, to assign the intolerant zeal of the weaker party as a cause of success, savours somewhat of folly.

The second cause is a valid one, but then it implies the divine origin of Christianity; "the doctrine of a future life improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth."

The third cause is also a valid one, but it likewise implies the divine origin of Christianity. "The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church." A pretence to miracles may suit a dominant and absolute priesthood, but would bring on the speedy ruin of a weak cause, and slender party.

The fourth cause assigned is "the pure and austere morals of the Christians." The purity of their morals might indeed gain them respect, but their austerity would scarcely add to the number of their disciples; still the main question ever recurs, whence did the Christians derive their superior purity?

The fifth cause is "the union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire." But whence did they derive their union, but from their mutual love, for there was no general government or coercive power to bind them together? whence their discipline, but from the purity of their morals, and the holiness of their rule of life? whence their freedom, but from the disinterestedness of the Apostles, who established these spiritual

“republics” of Christians throughout the Roman world, instead of making a gain of their converts, and erecting lordships for themselves in the midst of God’s heritage?

It is lamentable to reflect, that history has fallen under the dominion of infidelity, that of the three eminent historians, Robertson is barely neutral, and Hume and Gibbon are decidedly hostile, to Christianity. Thus the book of God’s providence, and of the manifestations of his wisdom, and long-suffering, and justice, can scarcely be read, by the general eye, till it is blurred and partly effaced by the comments of scepticism and profaneness; and the belief of the unguarded reader is assailed, not by arguments and open objections, but by continual insinuations, and by a slight, but perpetual, misrepresentation of facts. Gibbon’s history deserves the highest praise on account of its own intrinsic and various merits; though not the work of a vigorous reasoner, it is the production of a very capacious mind; but much of its reputation it once owed less to its merits than to its infidelity; and that transitory portion of his fame must not only be given back, but be repaid with interest. Gibbon must henceforth stand as much below his deserts, as he was once ranked above them. “Present time and future,” says Sir Joshua Reynolds, “may be considered as rivals; and he who solicits the one, must expect to be discountenanced by the other.” But of all the flatterers of present time, and present opinions, he who pays his court to

infidelity has the worst prospect with respect to the future. If he succeeds, the superstition he overturned, and his arguments against it, are both forgotten together, and if truth be the object which he assails, his defeat is final and irremediable. Notwithstanding his great powers, Gibbon has already sunk, and must sink still lower, in the scale of popularity, and begins to receive, even in this world, a measure of retribution for having chosen the worst side, in the great contest for evil and for good, and for having staked his all on Christianity being untrue,—his reputation here,—and his happiness hereafter.

IX. None of the infidel writers have produced so deep and so wide an impression as Rousseau. All the rest seem scarcely sincere in their scepticism : Rousseau alone is the eloquent and fervent apostle of unbelief. Other infidels would destroy Christianity without having fixed on any other system to substitute in its place ; but if Rousseau has no system, he has abundance of sentiments and imaginations, and has a dim and poetical deity of his own to worship, though he can assign no definite attributes to it, nor form any positive conception of his shadowy God. “ *Cet Etre qui veut et qui peut, cet Etre actif par lui-même, cet Etre, enfin, quel qu’il soit, qui meut l’univers et ordonne toutes choses, je l’appelle Dieu*——il se dérobe également à mes sens et à mon entendement ; plus j’y pense, plus je me confonds :—J’apperçois Dieu partout dans ses œuvres, je le sens en moi, je le vois tout autour de

moi ; mais sitôt que je veux le contempler en lui-même, sitôt que je veux chercher où il est, ce qu'il est, quelle est sa substance, il m'échappe, et mon esprit troublé n'apperçoit plus rien."* Yet with all this vagueness in his notion of the Deity, he can discover, at a single glance, that Christianity is repugnant to the divine character, and to the sentiments which God has implanted in the mind of man. "Je n'y vois qu'embarras, mystère, obscurité."† Notwithstanding his misty dreams about what he calls "*La Religion Naturelle*," he is astonished that any revealed religion should be offered to him. "Il est bien étrange qu'il en faille une autre ;"‡ and tries to get rid of it in a very summary way, upon the ground that revelation rests upon human testimony. "Quoi toujours des témoignages humains ? toujours des hommes qui me rapportent ce que d'autres hommes ont rapporté ? Que d'hommes entre Dieu et moi !"§ The examination of the

* This Being, who wills, and who can—this Being self-acting—this Being, in fine, whatever he may be, who moves the universe, and regulates all things, I call God—he is withdrawn alike from my sense and from my understanding—the more I think of him, the more I am confounded—I perceive God every where in his works. I feel him in myself, I see him all around me ; but as soon as I wish to contemplate him in himself, to inquire where he is, what he is, what is his substance, he escapes from me, and my confused mind can no more perceive any thing.

† I discover in it only confusion, mystery, obscurity.

‡ It is very strange that another should be needed.

§ What, always human testimonies ? always men relating to me what other men have related to them ? How many men between God and me ?

evidences of Christianity (evidences which may be compressed within half an hour's reading, and yet with a complete and unanswerable demonstration, as in the example of Leslie's Short Method with a Deist) he terms a "horrible discussion," and talks of the immense erudition which it requires; but he ingenuously dispenses with all examination, by demanding higher evidence than the nature of the human understanding will admit. To believe in prophecy he says, "*il faudroit trois choses, dont le concours est impossible; savoir, que j'eusse été témoin de la prophétie, que je fusse témoin de l'événement, et qu'il me fut démontré que cet événement n'a pû quadrer fortuitement avec la prophétie: car fût elle plus précise, plus claire, plus lumineuse qu'un axiome de géométrie; puisque la clarté d'une prédiction faite au hazard n'en rend pas l'accomplissement impossible, cet accomplissement, quand il a lieu, ne prouve rien à la rigueur, pour celui qui l'a prédit.*"* Having thus demanded what he himself may well affirm it is impossible to obtain, his triumph is unbounded,—"*Voyez donc à quoi se rédui-*

* There must be three things, the concurrence of which is impossible; namely, that I should be a witness of the prophecy, that I should be a witness of the event, and that it should be demonstrated to me, that the event could not have coincided with the prophecy by chance: for were the prophecy more precise, and clear, and luminous, than an axiom of geometry, since the clearness of a prediction made at hazard does not render its accomplishment impossible, that accomplishment, when it takes place, does not in strictness, prove any thing for him who made it.

sent vos prétendues preuves surnaturelles, vos miracles, vos prophéties !”*

But we have already quoted too largely, and there is no end of the absurdities of infidelity ; one reason for scepticism, which Rousseau has not brought prominently forward, ought, however, to be noticed. The dread of future punishment, which, as we saw in Priestley, contributed to confirm him in the comfortable views of rational Christianity, has also added more than a few to the number of esprits forts. Rousseau mentions, that, in reading the authors of Port Royal, and the Oratoire, he became half a Jansenist, and that the terror of hell took possession of him ; and if Madame Warrens, and if his confessor, a mild and accommodating Jesuit, had not done their best to quiet him, “cette effrayante doctrine m’eût enfin tout à fait bouleversé.”† Still, in spite of all they could say, the dread of hell pursued him. He often asked himself, were I to die at this moment, shall I be damned ? “selon mes Jansénistes, la chose est indubitable.”‡ however he determined to bring the question to a test of his own. “Je me dis ; je m’en vais jeter cette pierre contre l’arbre qui est vis à vis de moi ; si je le touche, signe de salut ; si je le manque, signe de damnation.”§

* See then to what are reduced your pretended supernatural proofs, your miracles, your prophecies !

† This frightful doctrine would have completely upset me :

‡ According to my Jansenists, the thing is certain.

§ I said to myself ; I will throw this stone at the tree which is before me ; if I hit it, it is a sign of salvation ; if I miss it, a sign of damnation.

Having hit the tree, he says he had ever afterwards the assurance of salvation ; though this assurance was no doubt much strengthened by the doubts which he began to entertain whether there was any salvation at all, and he soon found more effectual means than that of casting stones against trees for quieting all apprehensions from futurity.

X. When the truth of Christianity has been established by the positive proof of miracles, prophecy, and internal evidence, little can be added to the immense weight of arguments in its favour, yet it is pleasant to see such acute examiners as Spinoza, Bayle, Hume, Voltaire, Gibbon, and Rousseau, minutely inspect the whole structure, and yet not able to detect a single flaw. Had Christianity been untrue, its falsehood could not have stood the test of such an examination. It is only doing the natural talents of such men justice, to observe, that it was the badness of their cause, not the want of eminent abilities, if their efforts to overturn Christianity were fruitless ; and if, instead of being crowned with success, they tended to advance the religion which they opposed. Though not always correct, they are always very ingenious reasoners ; and upon other subjects, with the single exception of religion, have not been wanting in bringing additions to knowledge. Several writers who were advocating the cause of Christianity have endeavoured to depreciate their abilities ; but they wanted nothing but a sincere belief in revelation, to have been as eminent benefactors to the world, as they were largely endowed

with the gifts of Providence. Had Voltaire, for example, put his varied talents to a right and hallowed use, his name would have been had in everlasting remembrance, as one who had made error ridiculous as well as hateful, who had brought home truth to every understanding, and who, uniting in a high degree, philosophy and common sense, had made the most difficult passages of science amusing as well as plain. But they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, and their foolish heart was darkened. They gave up the principles of Christianity, and could find no other in their stead. Even their infidelity became of a darker and more hopeless character as they grew in years. *Zadig*, the work of Voltaire's youth, is incomparably superior in sentiments of natural religion to *Candide*, the production of his old age. The progress in profanity and irreligion, which must have taken place in his mind between the composition of these two works, is very striking, and shows by what an imperceptible current men are borne forwards in their first progress in infidelity to that confirmed impiety which hates even the name of the Deity. The truth of Christianity is proved by the darkness of the heathen world: it is proved still more by the darkness of infidelity. The Gentile philosophers had some principles, however erroneous: the modern infidels have no other principle than that of removing from the truths of Christianity as far as they can, and they scarcely think themselves safe,

while the notion, or even the name of the Deity, is retained.

The truth of Christianity is proved by the morals of the ancient heathens. Practices which they related without a blush, are not even to be named in countries professing Christianity. The truth of Christianity is proved also by the morals of unbelievers. Their pages, even when a higher tone of sentiment is assumed, are too frequently stained with impurity, whether it is that the loss of higher hopes leave men sensual and earthly, or that, distrusting the power of mere reasoning, infidels have attempted to corrupt the heart, when they failed to perplex the understanding. Even when broken with age, or worn out with disease, many of these writers spend the last dregs of life in corrupting others, and seem to cling with fond remembrance to those vices that have deserted them, as the ghosts of impure lives were supposed, by the ancient moralists, to haunt the places, where their bodies were deposited, and to long to be reunited to their ancient companions, through whose medium all their pleasures and satisfactions had been derived.

XI. The first source of infidelity is the corruption of the heart: the weakness of the understanding is only the second. The silence which infidels in general observe, respecting the direct and positive proof of Christianity, is a sufficient evidence that they are aware of its strength. They cannot but know that works exist, containing, in a very moderate compass

too, the essence of the argument for Christianity, by refuting which, or even by invalidating which, they would be held as the oracles of the world. Yet they decline the trial, not from any diffidence certainly in their own abilities, but from a secret, though deep-seated consciousness, that the arguments for Christianity are invincible. Christians are always ready to meet them in the open field, but they refuse the main combat, and betake themselves to a petty and lingering warfare of detail. They shrink from the face of the direct evidence of Christianity, and spend their time in raising objections to its doctrines. Thus, it is evident, that if infidels neglect the proof of Christianity, contained in the writings of Paley and other standard authors, it is not that the arguments are too weak to engage their attention, but that they are too strong; and that if they were more easily refuted, they would be more frequently studied. It is the heart that first forsakes revelation; the head only follows its lead. The purity of Christianity is still more opposed to the lives of infidels, than the doctrines of Christianity are to their understandings.

XII. The second source of infidelity is the narrowness of the human understanding, united to the presumption which naturally proceeds from contracted views, for the less any one knows, the more disposed he is to draw bold and sweeping inferences from his own narrow field of information. There is a necessary difference between the views of the finite, and the infinite understanding. "My thoughts are not

as your thoughts," says God. The vision, which at a glance takes in the whole of immensity, and the vision which is confined to a mere point, of course, cannot form the same representation of existence. If our narrow and limited mind constitutes itself the judge of the revelation which God has vouchsafed to give us, whether of his own character or of our future destiny, error must unavoidably result from all our reasonings and inquiries. Whether we seek to modify revelation to our own comprehension, with rational divines, or reject it altogether as utterly incomprehensible, with the philosophic infidel, we carry along with us a principle of endless wandering from the truth, which will only bewilder us the more, the more closely we reason upon it, and precipitate us from mistake to mistake till we lose the last glimmer of light, and reach the confines of utter darkness. Infidelity has no facts nor principles to rest upon; like the reveries of ancient philosophy, it has nothing but *a priori* reasonings to support it, objections drawn from ignorance, and arguments borrowed from preconceived opinions and prejudices. But Christianity, like inductive philosophy, is established wholly upon facts and experience, it appeals to no principles but those which are in every day operation, and it rests upon the same evidence as all the other useful knowledge which we possess; and, if there be any difference, it is merely this, that the evidence for Christianity has been more strongly objected to.

examined, and proved, than any other evidence whatsoever.

XIII. The third source of infidelity is the imperfection of our knowledge, which, in its best estate, is progressive, but never full and perfect. It is evidently the intention of Providence that society should be advancing in knowledge ; that one generation should outstrip another, and that mankind are never to rest in any present attainment, but are ever to be pressing forward to some future discovery. Thus the human faculties have scope for perpetual activity, and none are precluded from exertion by the labours and success of former generations. But it is evident by this constitution of the moral world, that no age enjoys exactly the same degree of information as another, the system of science which is fitted for one period, is unfitted for a succeeding one, and the form of knowledge is ever changing, because continually expanding.

This condition of society precludes religion from giving either a perfect or imperfect disclosure of science. A full revelation of science would be unintelligible to the persons to whom it was immediately addressed, and would supersede, as soon as it was understood, the natural use of our faculties. An imperfect revelation of science could only be fitted to the circumstances of the generation to which it was first communicated, while its partial discoveries would appear like antiquated errors to the succeeding ages, which were ascending to higher eminences of truth

Thus while human science is in its nature progressive and changing, and revelation is absolute and determined; while the one is intended as the exercise of our faculties, and the other as the assistant of our weakness, it is necessary that each be kept distinct from the other, and that religion should employ the universal and permanent language of natural appearances, and not the mutable phraseology of scientific theories.

When religion therefore describes the creation, it describes it as it is pictured to the eye of sense, not as it is conceived by the changing systems of philosophy. The expressions of the Bible are thus equally intelligible to men in every period of time, provided they do not perplex themselves by endeavouring to accommodate the terms of scripture to their own theories. This difference however, between science and revelation is perhaps the greatest source of infidel objections. While the rude systems of early astronomy were conformable to the appearance of the heavens, the language of the Bible and of science was nearly the same, but the language of Copernicus, which was conformable to the real, and not the apparent movement of the heavens, sounded harsh to many who looked for philosophic accuracy, instead of universal intelligibility, as the characteristic of the language of divine inspiration. Hence many divines opposed the system of Copernicus, and many infidels adopted it, for the same reason, that it was supposed to be inimical to the

Bible. How much zeal on both sides was expended in idle discussion, while all will now allow, that the sun may rise and set in popular and scriptural language, without any question of the fact that he remains for ever in the centre of his system! It is greatly to be lamented that any pretended defenders of Christianity should be ignorant of this popular use of language in the Scriptures; it is they who give its venom to the opposition of infidelity. The Bible may easily be defended from the open attacks of its enemies, but not so easily from the fallacious support of its mistaken friends. It would be well that all divines had upon similar subjects the observation of Calvin ever present with them:—"Moses populariter scripsit, nos potius respexit quam sidera."^{*}

Geology, in our times, has revived the same disputes that astronomy excited in former times, and from the same cause. Geology has discovered new worlds upon our earth, as astronomy revealed new worlds beyond our earth, and the bounds of time are as much enlarged by geology, as the bounds of space were by astronomy. Many of the facts of geology were brought forward by men who expected by them to have overturned the authority of Moses, and several writers who came forward, as they would have it, in favour of revelation, instead of showing that these facts are not incompatible with the inspiration of Genesis, have thought it the easiest method

* Moses, wrote in the popular language; he regarded us rather than the stars.

boldly to deny them. A lover of truth will join neither party. Without doubting the facts of geology, he will still less doubt the evidences of Christianity. Finding evidence for both, he will admit the truth of both. If they should appear incompatible with each other, he will attribute that appearance to the scantiness of his information; he will not reject either the one or the other on that account, but will earnestly seek, and patiently wait for additional information, certain in his own mind that truth must ever be harmonious, and at unity with itself. In this case, however, the difficulty is not great; the same explanation which served to reconcile the account of Moses with the philosophy of Copernicus, will equally reconcile it with the discoveries of geology. The first verse of Genesis which, as we have before observed, carries along with it the stamp of its own divine origin, refers to the original creation of the heavens and the earth. The second verse refers to a subsequent state of chaos and disorder, without marking the interval, or the occurrences which had taken place between that ruined state of the earth, and the first creation of the world. Thus an interval in time is passed over unnoticed, as an interval in space is disregarded in the mention made by Moses of the stars. The new formation of the earth, is alone insisted upon, and its preparation for the abode of man. But we may observe in the new formation of the present earth, a striking analogy to what geology unfolds respecting former

worlds, and we see that objections only arise from the imperfection of our knowledge, and disappear on its progressive advancement, and that the difficulties which arise from a narrow view of things are changed into arguments and proofs, whenever information becomes more complete, and whenever our survey is extended upon all sides.

XIV. While the proofs for Christianity are ever the same, admitting of no change, but of a perpetual addition the objections of infidels are ever varying. The first writings against Christianity are totally different from those of later authors. The positions of Celsus and Porphyry are no longer tenable in our days, while the philosophy assumed by later infidels, and their mode of reasoning, would have been treated with contempt by the earlier antagonists of Christianity; but it is less surprising that infidels should differ from each other, since they differ no less from themselves. The opinions which they maintain at one moment, they reject the next. They extol in one passage the authority of reason, and its power to judge in all things that pertain either to this world or to the next; in another sentence or work, they depreciate its value as much below its real worth, as they formerly exalted it, and pronounce it totally incapable of ever reaching the sure discovery of truth. Sometimes they plead with apparent zeal for the being of a God, and contend that his existence is so clearly discernible, that a man must be deprived of reason, if he does not dis-

cern the legible traces of a Deity in the works of creation ; shortly afterwards they are in utter doubt and darkness, unable to pronounce whether a Deity exists or not ; then they are equally confident on the opposite side, that the notion of a Deity is a mere chimera, for which no resemblance exists in the reality of things. Now, they contend for the eternal and unchangeable obligations of morality, and now they maintain that morality is only a useful fiction, invented for the benefit of society, and has no other existence than what it derives from human institutions and laws. In short, infidelity is like the region of the shadow of death described by Job, "Even a land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, and where the light is as darkness."

Infidelity is only constant to one principle, the enjoyment of the present time undisturbed by the future ; for, as the Arabian Caliph expressed it,

"How happy we live if a shadow would last ;"

or, as Diderot has expressed it, less poetically, but not less naturally, "*On seroit assez bien dans ce monde, si l'on n'avoit rien à craindre dans l'autre.*" *

Christianity never changes, but has adduced the same evidence from Origen to Paley. That evidence never varies, though it continually increases, and it

* We should be happy enough in this world, if we had nothing to fear in the other,

presents the same facts and evidences to all succeeding inquirers, though, with a conviction that is ever deepening, and with a variety that is receiving continual additions.

XV. If the evidences for Christianity are so varied and excellent, they are not without their obligations to the ingenuity of infidel writers. In fact, Sceptics have done much more to support Christianity, than infidelity. Their arguments in favour of their own side of the question, are soon cast away and forgotten; but the works they call forth in answer to their attacks upon religion, remain long after the temporary controversy which gave them birth, and continue to minister to the edification of Christians, who may never have heard of the opponents to whom they were indebted for so clear a display of divine truth. Thus, in the scheme of divine government, evil is fleeting, but good is permanent: errors are ever arising and falling in endless succession, but the truths which are opposed to these errors, shine with endless and undecaying lustre, like the lights of Heaven, when the clouds that for a moment obscure them are broken, and altogether dissolved. All the best works on Christianity are owing to the attacks of infidels; we are indebted to Celsus for the defence of Origen, and to the prevalent infidelity of the day for the immortal work of Paley.

XVI. The general tone of thinking of the present day is favourable to infidelity. We have abundance of superficial and sensible reasoners, men who have

faith enough to believe all that they see ; philosophers who are indeed of the earth, earthy. The metaphysics of Germany, as we have before observed, tend to Pantheism, but the metaphysics of most in France, and of many in England, lead directly to Materialism and Atheism. No long and learned train of reasoning in either of these countries is permitted ; every argument that would make any impression on the public mind, must be brief and popular, and nothing is attended to but that compendious philosophy, which proves that nothing can be known except what comes within the comprehension of the meanest capacity. While this state of things is favourable for the rejection of religious truth at home, philosophic Atheism and Pantheism reign triumphant in many parts of the continent, and hold united empire with Popery, sometimes receiving converts from it, and at other times restoring its disciples to the dominion of blind credulity. But Popery and other sects can scarcely withstand the torrent of modern innovation, and whatever superstition loses, infidelity gains.

Thus matters go on prosperously for the cause of incredulity, which receives accessions by all changes of the public mind, and by every increase of secular knowledge. Not that infidelity may ever have so brilliant a period again, as when Voltaire, Hume, and Rousseau were all flourishing at once in the full vigour of their faculties ; and when shallow, though crowned heads, were among their disciples, not clear enough sighted to discern that the best friend of

tyranny, is superstition. Nor are those golden days likely to be restored, when the progress of infidelity was so rapid, that they counted their converts not by individuals, but by states and nations. The French revolution has given a blight to this too forward spring, and matters must proceed more leisurely for the future. Infidelity too, instead of having genius for its patron and advocate, no longer confers distinctions, or feeds vanity. Its most ardent and conspicuous defenders and zealots are now amongst the lowest and most illiterate of the rabble. Still it has the great body of modern literature on the continent in its favour, and it has few opponents save those who are blinded by Popery, or disabled by rational theology. And while superstition is favourable to existing abuses, innovation, as a natural consequence, must be the friend and ally of infidelity. Every ardent, and many benevolent friends, are enlisted on the side of a false philosophy, and when a new struggle for freedom commences upon the continent, it is to be feared that most of the patriots will look upon every form of Christianity that deserves the name, as opposed to the cause in which they are engaged, and as inimical to the welfare of the human race.

XVII. If infidelity increases, we need not doubt that genuine religion will increase also. There is a very needless alarm about infidelity ; it is merely the wind which separates and blows away the chaff. Infidelity has ever been a pioneer to true religion. The growing scepticism of the ancient Pagans was

one of the great causes, as far as natural means are concerned, of the rapid progress of primitive Christianity. The scepticism that widely prevailed throughout the countries under the thralldom of popery, immediately previous to the Reformation, was the precursor of the glorious change, when men, at the preaching of Luther, were turned from darkness into light, and received the everlasting gospel, instead of the lying legends of a slavish superstition. The prevalence of infidel opinions preceded the revival of true religion, both in England during the course of the eighteenth century, and also the more partial revival upon the Continent in our own times. And in all cases scepticism will be found doing the same good offices in religious creeds, as in philosophical systems, detecting every flaw, sweeping down whatever has no foundation, and preparing a large and vacant space for erecting the solid and ever durable edifice of truth.



PART SEVENTH.

PRESENT STATE OF ERRORS.

- I. Old Errors yielding to Scepticism or Christianity
- II. New Errors insignificant.
- III. Minute Sects and Differences.
- IV. Superficial Turn of Mind.
- V. Systems discarded ; yet the Scriptures little studied.
- VI. Unscriptural Experience and Comfort.
- VII. Unscriptural View of the Divine Law.
- VIII. Unscriptural View of the Gospel.
- IX. Unscriptural View of the Kingdom of Heaven
- X. Study of the Whole of Scripture.
- XI. Clear and Full Preaching of the Gospel.
- XII. Avoiding Novelty, and Uniting with all Good Men.
- XIII. The Spirit of Light and Love poured out from on High

PART VII.

PRESENT STATE OF ERRORS

1. AN inevitable change is coming over the world. New powers are brought into existence. Whatever is old and established is of itself already worn out, and will have little strength to contend with the recent and hostile energies, which it must speedily encounter. Old opinions are already beginning to give way, not in this or that country alone, but all over the world. Even the Hindoos and the Chinese have their infidels and their radicals. The sceptical writings of the French have already been translated into many languages; and if a new revolution were to break out in the heart of Europe, there would be less difficulty in spreading its principles far and wide, than there was when the French made some attempts to gain proselytes to their politics and philosophy, in distant nations. Polytheism, which once overspread the whole earth, except the land of Judea, is much curtailed, in its extent, notwithstanding its revival in Popery; and the ignorance upon which it is founded.

is every day lessened. Pantheism may keep its footing for a time in Germany or Persia, and may even gain a number of votaries who are forsaking Polytheism; but it, too, must yield to the current of modern discovery, and to the attacks of that ceaseless inquiry, which will wear away all systems which are not founded upon the basis of truth.

The scepticism of Hume is as applicable to the philosophy of Kant, as to the philosophy of Locke; and the term of Phenomenism, characterizes the transcendental Idealism of the Germans, as well as the systems founded upon sensible ideas amongst the English. It is in vain that Kant and others have attempted to prove the existence of a Deity, of an external world, or of the world itself. *Ex nihilo nihil;** from ideas nothing but ideas can proceed. Nothing can have any resemblance to a thought but a thought.

Amongst the Sufis more become infidels than remain confirmed Pantheists. They imbibe enough of the mystical doctrine heartily to despise all positive religion, but not enough to furnish them with any fixed principles or consistent belief.

Every improvement that takes place, every discovery in art and nature, has a tendency to disturb ancient opinions, which were founded upon previous ignorance or error, and which have no other support than the darkness and credulity of the mind. Thus.

* From nothing, nothing.

all things are favourable for the spread of infidelity ; and, if so, for Christianity also, for infidelity has no substance or vitality in itself ; and Christianity is the only system which can be established on its ruins. Thus, whatever is gained for knowledge is gained for Christianity. Whatever accelerates or facilitates the intercourse of mankind, is preparing new and easier openings for the diffusion of the Gospel. Christianity must gain by every event, and be ultimately established by every change.

II. There are only four great errors in religion. The first is the religion of the senses and the imagination, or Polytheism and Popery. The second is the religion of sense, imagination, and reason, combined ; or Pantheism, with Mysticism ; or Pantheism Christianized. The third is the contracting revelation to our narrow faculties, or rational Christianity. And the fourth error is the rejecting Christianity altogether as contrary to our natural understanding, or Infidelity. The last error is swallowing up the three first ; but of all these errors it has least subsistence in itself, and is continually wasting itself away.

All other errors are insignificant when compared with these. Other heresies are but the peculiarities of individuals, which have only a partial extent, and a limited duration. These errors, on the contrary, belong to the human mind, reappear in every age and country ; and though they have enrolled in their support very distinguished names in literature and science, are less indebted to any individual aid, than

to those permanent weaknesses and propensities of man's darkened understanding which originally produced them.

All the minor sects owe their birth to persons of very inferior talents, and at the same time do not take equally deep hold of the mind itself. They may create a temporary interest and a local alarm. They are lamentable on account of the injury they may inflict upon individuals, but they are of no more consequence in retarding the progress of Christianity, than the loss of one or two out-posts would be in deciding the fate of a campaign. Many of these heresies are but the errors of a few wrong-headed individuals, and are chiefly brought into notice by the vehement outcry that is raised against them.

III. These heresies are frequently exaggerated, not only in their importance and magnitude, but also in their numbers. Lists of these are handed about by the Papists, as irrefragable proofs of the evils produced by the indiscriminate reading of the Scriptures, and by making the Bible the sole authority in religious controversy. But these heresies have no more connexion with the Scriptures, than Popery itself has. They have altogether their rise from the folly, the narrow-mindedness, and the party-spirit of men; and the study of the Scriptures, instead of being the occasion of these disputes, is their only cure.

The list of heresies, filled as it is with barbarous denominations and unintelligible distinctions, has indeed a formidable aspect. Each of the sects is

unimportant in itself ; but they make up in numbers for the want of weight. Yet when examined, these numbers appear of less consequence. Many of these sects have no existence but on paper ; they are merely various names for the same denomination, and others are founded entirely upon misconception.

Others of these sects are the offspring of the reveries of some deranged persons, of good natural talents, it may be, and of pious character, but who have mistaken the deep impressions of religion upon a disordered imagination, for new discoveries of divine truth, or a deeper insight into the sacred writings. While the earnestness and the depth of their conviction has procured them a few disciples, who contrasted their zeal with the indifference of many around them. and felt that any opinion maintained with sincerity upon the solemn subject of eternity, was wiser than no opinion at all. Still, the folly of minutely characterizing these, would be as great as that of keeping a regular register of the sayings and tenets of Bedlam, and arranging its inmates with a scrupulous classification of their respective opinions and systems.

Many of these heresies consist merely in the exaggeration of some particular truth. No positive error brought forward, but many great and useful truths are neglected, and the whole system of belief is out of proportion ; still, this is no further heresy than what inevitably proceeds from an imperfect acquaintance with the truth.

A very great number of these pretended heresies consist in differences too minute to be preconceived by the naked eye, and can be seen only through the microscope of Sectarianism. That they do differ from other Christians is but too evident ; but why they differ, would require the subtle genius of Thomas Aquinas satisfactorily to account for. Let but the Holy Spirit breathe upon our souls, and the Sun of Righteousness arise without a cloud, and all these differences will disappear as speedily as the morning mists.

IV. Many of the present disputes, and peculiarities in religion, arise from the turn of the public mind, more than ever averse to severe thought or patient examination. Man has been defined a thinking animal ; but real and severe thought is not common in any age of the world. The public mind, however, is more capable of following a train of thoughts at one time than another. At present a variety of pursuits distract the attention from steadily fixing on any one. A variety of popular publications, written with little talent or power, produce no spirit-stirring effect upon the reader ; the languid curiosity is easily gratified, and information, such as it is, is presented almost before it is required, and passes from the eye or ear to the tongue, without rousing the understanding from its slumber. In education, all difficulties are purposely removed, as if difficulty were not necessary for exertion, and exertion for strength ; and the maxim of the heathen moralist is forgotten, that the

gods sell all things, and that labour is the price which they demand.

It may easily be supposed, that the religious world partake of the character of the age in which they live, and labour under greater disadvantages, for they have the same temptations to a frivolous turn of mind, with the additional listlessness of not having the same variety of pursuits and objects. Their chief reading consists in a number of ephemeral publications, whose only excellence very frequently consists in their piety ; all whose sayings have long been said before, and where an original thought would be as beautiful and unexpected as a pellucid lake among the dry and barren sands of Arabia. It is not surprising that the minds which are nourished by such writings, should have little taste or appetite for perusing the Scriptures, and should feel themselves bewildered in the midst of one of Paul's epistles, with the magnificent bursts of his imagination, and the fervid and consecutive energy of his arguments.

V. While artificial systems of theology are generally disused, the Scriptures are rather studied in detached parts, than as a whole. The present age exults in its freedom from the trammels of ancient authority, but is more quick-sighted to discover the blemishes than the excellencies of its predecessors. The systems of artificial theology have their uses as well as their disadvantages ; they indeed exaggerated and displaced several scriptural truths, and gave to others

a speculative air rather than their true and practical bearing, but they had a great superiority over the partial induction not unfrequent in our time, which selects passages here and there out of Scripture, and accommodates them to its own pleasure, instead of submitting to be guided by the whole scope of Scripture. On the contrary, the artificial systems excelled in fullness ; it was not a portion, but the whole of Scripture, that they brought into their method, and every doctrine had a place in their arrangement, though these doctrines might have been more simply and scripturally expressed, and have observed more exactly the natural order of the Bible. The only advantage of giving up these ancient bodies of divinity is, that they should make way for the study of the Scriptures as a whole, and that we should drink the waters of life more freshly from their fountain. But they had better have been retained, if nothing was to succeed them, but the detached and scattered study of the Scriptures in detail, and the collection of a few picked and favourite texts to support some particular dogma. The great danger now is, that many truths should be omitted, and that one or two topics, should be insisted on in the forgetfulness of all the rest ; and that to occupy the blank thus occasioned, these few topics should be stretched far beyond their just dimensions ; as in the old maps of Africa, the names of a few insignificant tribes on the coast were made the denominations of mighty empires, and concealed the map maker's ig-

norance of that unknown continent, by stretching far beyond their proper bounds into the interior of the country. These however are the evils of a state of transition. In the great change which has taken place, the old authority is discarded, before the new authority is properly recognised. It is necessary to have some system. The law of continuity prevails every where, and if in throwing off the artificial systems of theology we do not follow the natural system of the Scriptures, we shall unawares follow a system of our own, and that in all probability a very pitiful one.

VI. The Scriptures are the guide of life. At whatever point we depart from them, we fall into some diversity of error. Even those who are most occupied about religion ; who are seeking for its comforts, and who know that it is the great object here below ; yet if their eye be not kept steadily all the while upon the Scriptures, are very apt to make to themselves, in part at least, a religion of their own. There are many passages in the lives of decidedly pious people, which are lauded by their biographers, and viewed with complacency by themselves, which yet receive little countenance from the Bible ; frames and feelings which have more connexion with the body than with the mind ; enjoyments and depressions, advancements and obstacles, which have more reference to peculiar opinions and imaginary excellence, than to the unchangeable nature of divine truth, or conformity to the character of divine holi-

ness. We must repeat that it is comfort, and not truth, which many regard, and that feeling is too frequently mistaken for belief. The deep and varied experience of many, upon which, even were it according to the Scriptures, they lay an undue stress, proceeds not from their knowledge of the truth, but from their ignorance of it. It is the dimness, and not the clearness of their notions, which so powerfully affects their minds. In their experience there is indeed much that is excellent, but the mistake consists in supposing that all of it is excellent, and in not bringing it continually to the test of Scripture, and comparing it with what was experienced by holy men of old. In experimental religion the Bible is our only sure rule, and the examples there recorded our only safe models. Following in the foot-prints of the Apostles and prophets, we shall never wander from the way, nor have occasion to retrace our steps, but every advance we make will be along the highway to the heavenly city. |

VII. It is by the teaching of the Holy Spirit that we alone are convinced of the infinite purity of the divine law, and of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Those who have been trusting to their own works, and seeking for salvation by the deeds of the law, when convinced of the sin adhering to all their efforts, and when looking to the Saviour, who alone can fulfil the law in its infinite extent, have naturally and justly a great abhorrence of legality, but this abhorrence should rest on scriptural grounds. It is

the excellence, and not the defects, of the law, and our own fallen nature, which render it impossible for us to be saved by legal works. The law in itself is good—infininitely good. A legal spirit consists not in thinking too high of the law, but too low of it, and in supposing that it can be fulfilled by fallen and corrupt natures; but the Antinomian attributes his own deficiencies to the divine law, and thinks he manifests his absence of a legal spirit most when he depreciates that transcript of the will of God. He thinks that Christ came to destroy the law, whereas Christ came to fulfil it. The law of God is eternal, because it is the expression of his eternal will. Plain and simple as this truth is, it is misunderstood by many, who place the gospel in opposition to the law, not seeing that the opposition lies only between faith and works, between working for our own salvation, and believing in a work already finished.

The number of decided Antinomians who make an open profession of their doctrine may be but few; but the spirit of Antinomianism is not confined to such narrow limits. It is much easier to convince men of the danger of sin, than of the guilt of sin, and there is a vague way of preaching the gospel, which tends to encourage that imperfect view of it, which considers Christ as a Saviour rather from the penalty of sin, than from its power. The gospel consists of two parts, repentance towards God, as well as faith in the Lord Jesus. To believe in Christ as a Saviour, we must understand in some degree in

what salvation consists: We must be taught by the Holy Spirit, and discern by that teaching the infinite purity of the divine character and the divine law. In that view consists repentance, or the change of the mind in the awakened sinner, when he sees that he has forsaken the fountain of living waters, in order to hew out cisterns to himself that can hold no water, and when he perceives that his pursuit of happiness, without taking God into his account, is but a treasuring up of wrath against the day of wrath. Convinced now of his own folly and guilt, and seeing but one way of escape from the terrors of divine justice, he ceases from his own works, that he may trust in the one finished work, and in the everlasting righteousness of the divine Saviour. Thus conviction both of the guilt and danger of sin is the first step of salvation, and the first operation of the Divine Spirit. Where there is only a conviction of the danger of sin, we need not be surprised that the apparent conversion is but slight and temporary, and, when the momentary alarm has subsided, that we behold the sinner again careless and secure, confidently erecting his frail edifice upon the sand, and dreaming that he is building for eternity.

VIII. As a vague representation of the divine character and the divine law gives rise to Antinomianism, so a confused view of the gospel gives rise to many unscriptural errors respecting the entrance of the way of life. The Gospel, as it comes pure from the mouth of God, is most remarkable for its divine simplicity. Its whole tenor consists in the

command "believe and live." And if it be asked, what is it that we must believe? the answer is short and plain. Believe that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." This however is too simple a salvation for the taste of men, they are always tempted either to add to it, or to refine upon it. The gospel is infinitely free. But it is not free enough in the opinion of some, and it is too free in the opinion of others. The last seek to guard and fence the divine declarations lest they should mislead the unwary, and, instead of the simple trust and belief in the gospel, gives us subtle distinctions and varieties of faith, that savour more of the ingenuity of casuistry, than of the truth of Scripture. The first, who refine upon the simplicity of the gospel, inform us, that it is a mistake to think that we can be saved by believing the gospel. No, we can only be saved by the gospel believed. Such are the follies into which men run who proclaim themselves the only true disciples of the Saviour, who think they are the people, and that wisdom shall die with them, and who yet look with more abhorrence on a blood pudding than on the Sabellian heresy, and consider the desecration of the Lord's day a noble confession of Christian faith, and freedom, and a testimony to the truth worthy of the primitive martyrs. Others maintain, that we are all pardoned; but that if we do not believe in this universal pardon, for which there is no other evi

dence than two or three mis-translations of Scripture, we shall be eternally punished, as well as everlastingly pardoned. The individuals, who hold these and other pernicious doctrines, were more likely, a few years ago, to be extensively useful than almost any other individuals. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall; and let all who have the interests of religion and humanity at heart, be earnest in their prayers, that all Christians, and that young converts especially, may be preserved from the many errors which so easily beset them, and that the Divine Spirit may bring back again into the truth the individuals above alluded to, that they may be delivered from the snare into which they have fallen, and then few will be better able to refute, and none will be more eager to deplore, their own hurtful heresies than themselves.

IX. Unscriptural views of Christ's kingdom are very natural to the mind of man, and have, therefore, in all ages, been very common. The empire of the Saviour is an anomaly in the world; it is supported, not by might or power, but by the Divine Spirit. It is not evident to the senses of the natural man; it must be spiritually discerned. Except a man be born again, he cannot even see the kingdom of God. The Jews had no other conception of the Messiah's kingdom than that of his reigning in great power and majesty visibly upon earth. The Apostles were of the same mind before the Spirit was poured out upon them, and looked for the visible reign of

the Saviour, residing and ruling upon the earth, and expected that they themselves should be exalted with him here below, and that the saints should enjoy pre-eminence, and exercise lordship over the nations. Many were the intimations they received that Christ's kingdom was not of this world. But they understood them not till they were taught from above.

The same earthliness of mind revived the same doctrines amongst the Millennarians, who dreamt of an earthly paradise during a thousand years, in which their reanimated bodies should enjoy, in innocence, all earthly satisfactions and delights, instead of the glories of heaven. But while these were dreaming of an empire still future, the Papists seized on the present enjoyment of it, and reigned as kings and priests over the earth, not with the Saviour, but in direct opposition to his saints and his cause. Since the Reformation, the notion of the saints, smiting the ungodly, and taking possession of the earth, has always had its advocates from the Anabaptists downwards; and, above all, in times of civil changes, as when Venner, with his small, but determined band, proclaimed the fifth monarchy, filled the whole of London with alarm, and fought with a courage which has never been surpassed, and scarcely ever equalled, except by some fanatic warriors among the early Moslems.

But our Saviour's kingdom is to be established by no other sword but the sword of the Spirit. It comes not with outward observation, but with inward

power. Christ's sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness, of truth, and persuasion; not a rod of force and coercion, except towards his enemies. His enemies must indeed perish, but they shall perish like the hosts of Midian, by each other's hands. As the time draws near when our Saviour is coming to destroy Babylon, we are forewarned, that many will cry, Lo here, and lo there, expecting a bodily appearance and a local display of power. We know how the prediction of the coming of the Saviour to judge Jerusalem was accomplished; and therefore we know in what his coming will consist, to judge Babylon. The same imagery is employed in describing both, and both will have a similar fulfilment.

Many are the wild and incoherent dreams respecting events still future. This is to be attributed in part to the long and culpable neglect of the prophetic writings. The blind, when their eyes are first opened, see men as it were trees walking. This is partly owing to their betaking themselves to the Scriptures in the same spirit in which men had recourse of old to the soothsayers and astrologers, not to learn what the will of God is with respect to themselves, but to indulge a vain and irreligious curiosity concerning things to come.

The personal reign of Christ upon earth rests upon no evidence. The mistake consists in understanding many portions literally, of a work that must be universally allowed to be figurative; and much more might have been said for the personal appearance of

Christ at the destruction of Jerusalem, than at the destruction of Babylon. There are fewer texts in favour of the latter, than of the former; and the example of the former proves that we are to understand these texts figuratively and typically, of the great advent of our Saviour, when, having completed his work of mediation and intercession in the presence of the Father, and filled up the number of the elect, he shall come to pass sentence on the angels who kept not their first estate, and upon men who obeyed not the Gospel.

But the dream of Christ's personal reign on earth proceeds upon a complete ignorance of what Christ's kingdom consists in, and of what his offices are. The kingdom of Christ is within us, not without us; and it is within us that he reigns, visible to the eye of faith, and not of sense. He begins to reign within us when we submit to him: and he reigns completely in each individual as soon as every thought is brought under subjection to his law. When the Bible becomes the rule of life, and the Holy Spirit the guide of life, then is the reign of Christ universal, and the glory of the Millennium begun. The Millennium, therefore, consists in the universal diffusion of the Divine Spirit. But the Divine Spirit is given so abundantly, because Christ is exalted at the right hand of God to give gifts to men; and, above all, the gift of his Spirit purchased by his blood. The right hand of God is, therefore, the place where the Saviour remains during the Millennium, pouring out

his Spirit upon all flesh, and realizing to the utmost the prediction of the latter days. The right hand of God is the place from which Christ, as the prophet and teacher of his people, sends forth his Spirit to teach them, and to make his word effectual to their souls. At the right hand of God, Christ, as priest in the heavenly temple, presents for ever his sacrifice, and forever intercedes for his people. At the right hand of God, Christ sits as a King, not of this earth alone, but of all worlds; and from the seat of universal sovereignty over the creation, administers and orders the affairs of the infinite inheritance he has obtained. Therefore he must sit at the right hand of God till his enemies are made his footstool. Now, the last enemy that is to be subdued is death, and death shall be swallowed up in victory only then, when, at the appearing of Christ to judge the world, both it, and Hades shall be cast into the lake of fire.

X. All errors in religion proceed from trusting to our own understanding, and all the useful truths we possess, are drawn from the fountain of sacred truth, the lively oracles of God. Hence the continual necessity of having recourse to the law and to the testimony, and of studying the Scriptures as we would any other book, as a whole, not taking little detached portions out of them, and putting our own constructions upon these separated fragments. The general scope of Scripture, and the consecutiveness of inspired argument, will preserve us from many errors into which we might otherwise easily slide. If we

mistake the meaning of one passage, we shall be set right by that which follows it: we shall have line upon line, precept upon precept—here a little and there a little; and though human weakness may mistake one or two passages, nothing but wilful and systematic perversion can misinterpret them all. In the Bible we have the continual unfolding of the same eternal plan; and we may trace the divine purposes from the dawn of their manifestation to their clear and unclouded display. We have truths placed in every variety of light, and examples under every diversity of circumstances.

It is a great mistake to think that any part of divine truth should be omitted. These passages which are supposed to be the darkest, are made sufficiently clear in their general design by judicious interpreters. But even if their bearing towards the persons and events to which they chiefly refer, were not clearly discerned, their practical bearing towards us is never doubtful. The particular events to which prophecy refers may require an interpreter; but the moral lessons which it inculcates, and the view of the divine character which it exhibits, require none. An humble and patient study of prophecy, attended with much prayer, not neglecting the best human help, would not only be beneficial to the Christian himself, but would check the rise of many of those pernicious errors and extravagant fancies, which, upon this subject especially, from time to time, infest the Church of Christ.

XI. Great is the power of the Christian ministry, if rightly used, in all things that pertain to life and godliness, and not least in repressing the growth of heresies. Ministers have but to ask for the prayers of the believing part of their congregation, and surely they will have them ; and if they have them, they will have the large aid of the Divine Spirit also. Accompanied with a divine energy, the word of God is made widely effectual to the conversion of sinners, and opens its inexhaustible treasury for the supply of the wants of all believers. The great aim of the Christian teacher is, to make his scholars acquainted with the general scope of the whole Bible, and to make them intelligent readers of it at home. This seems the essential part of Christian instruction : whatever can be added to this is highly desirable, though not so imperatively necessary ; and the minute explanation and enforcement of particular passages will be most advantageous to those who are already furnished with a general comprehension of the Scriptures.

There is one temptation which besets those who have often and clearly preached the Gospel ; a weariness of repeating the same truth, day after day, and year after year, and frequently too with little visible effect. They think if they could vary their discourses they would make more impression upon their hearers ; and accordingly the Gospel is thrown into the back ground, and in some discourses altogether omitted. The resolution of the Apostle is a necessary

one, for all who have to speak to perishing sinners ; to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. The more variety with the Gospel, and the less variety without it, the better. There is no theme throughout the whole of existence, where Christ, the Creator of all worlds, and the Redeemer of our lost race, may not with propriety hold a conspicuous place.

Another error, still more hurtful and objectionable, consists in laying aside a doctrine for a time, which happens to be peculiarly patronized by some who are esteemed heretical. The very contrary is no doubt the course which good sense would recommend, the more a doctrine is perverted, the more need it has of being frequently placed in its proper light. If the freeness of the Gospel be exaggerated, and placed in an absurd point of view, the more need there is, that the infinite freeness of the Gospel should be clearly and scripturally maintained. If a spurious assurance of faith is gaining ground, the more necessary it is to point out on what grounds scriptural assurance is founded.

XII. One great origin of heresies is the pretension to novelty. Now, it is impossible that there can be any thing new in the essentials of religion. Whosoever is saved, is saved by believing the same fundamental truths, from the days of the Apostles, to the end of the world. The only place where novelty can be admitted is in the illustration, or application, of these truths ; for, as these truths are facts relating to

the divine government, they are as boundless and endless in their influence as space and eternity; they are possessed of infinite variety, and allow of endless discovery.

Since the truths by which each believer is saved are for ever the same, this identity of religious views dissuades us from cherishing any peculiar notions of our own, and urges us to maintain the same leading doctrines, and to hold fast the form of sound words which are common to all good men, whether alive or dead, whether intimately connected with us, or removed far from us in all other views and sentiments, except those which relate to eternal life.

Our belief is, indeed, not to rest upon the opinions of fallible men, but upon the sure word of God. Yet, in casting off human authority, a great and absurd mistake is too frequently made. An independent seeker after truth judges rightly that all men are fallible. Unfortunately, without perceiving it, he makes an exception in favour of himself. He thinks his opinions must be right, because he took them wholly from the Bible; and because he despises all human authority, he forgets that there is the same cause for his seeing the truths of the Bible through a discoloured medium, as for other men; his understanding is naturally as dark, and his heart as corrupt, as that of the divines and commentators whose interpretation he rejects. One great use of consulting commentators is this, that all minds are liable to error, but not equally to the same errors. Thus, the ray of truth is refracted

as it enters through the dusky medium of the mind of man ; but different minds have different refractive powers : we can so adjust them as to countervail the defects of our own peculiar vision, and behold correctly the distant objects which revelation discovers, and form a correct outline of the remote, though rapidly approaching realities of eternity.

XIII. But to unite with all good men, we must join with them in heart as well as understanding ; and for this we need the Spirit of life and love to be poured out abundantly upon us. None are so richly furnished with Christian gifts and graces as to be able to stand alone, and unconnected with others, without much loss both to their usefulness, and to their advancement in the spiritual life. The Holy Spirit does not merely impart his gifts to the children of men : he divides them severally to whom he will ; and it is only by the united exercise of these divided gifts, that all the mighty advantages to be derived from them can be reaped. It is a harvest which must be collected for the public benefit, before it can be individually appropriated. Without the teaching of the Spirit, not only will Christian gifts languish, because cultivated in the case of each individual only by himself, and for himself, but the clearest understanding, even when put in possession of the truth, will retain but a cold and moonlight view of it. Distinct it may be in its dark outlines, but not represented in all its diversity and life, unless the Divine Teacher, who first discovered it to the mind, keep up its fading

impression on the soul, by continually renewing it, and, brooding over the ruins of our nature, as over the chaos of a former world, bring back all into order, and separate the light of truth from that darkness, which, in the mind of man, is so continually mingling with it

PART EIGHTH.

UNIVERSAL CHRISTIANITY.

- I. Christianity, like every other system, has its essential doctrines.
- II. The reception or rejection of these divides the world into two Classes.
- III. The folly of divisions amongst those who are united in Essentials.
- IV. All who receive the Bible in sincerity have one Faith.
- V. Variety of Views without diversity of Faith.
- VI. Mistake of Means for the End.
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PART VIII.

UNIVERSAL CHRISTIANITY.

1. CHRISTIANITY, like every other system of truth, consists of a few general and essential principles, and of a variety of particular applications. One essential truth is connected with another, and may be easily deduced from it. They are all mutually united with each other, and afford mutual evidence and support. Christianity is a religion addressed to sinners; it is entirely occupied about the removal of sin, and the abolishing both its guilt and its power. Hence, to enter into Christianity as a system of revealed truths, the disciple must be deeply convinced of sin; and this conviction of sin is the first work of our Divine Teacher, the Spirit. It is necessary that we have an intimate conviction of the guilt of sin, as well as of its danger; and not only of its contrariety to human happiness, but to the holy and unchangeable character of God. When we behold the wrath of God revealed against all unrighteousness of men, we shall flee without delay to the ark of

safety provided for us. Conviction of sin leads necessarily to a cordial acceptance of the atonement ; and the Holy Spirit convinces us of sin for the express purpose, that we may joyfully accept his testimony to the Saviour. The atonement as necessarily leads to the belief of a divine Saviour, who could alone fulfil that law for others, which all creatures are bound to fulfil for themselves. The deeper the conviction of sin, the more steadfast will be the belief in the atonement, and in the deity of the Saviour. A sense of guilt and inability to fulfil the divine commandments, as it cuts the sinner off from all trust in himself, will cause him to place unlimited trust in the divine Redeemer, who is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Conviction of sin must further lead to an earnest desire to be freed from the power of sin ; and is as intimately linked with the faith which sanctifies, as with the faith which justifies. And since the warfare with sin must continue while the believer remains in the flesh, the more deeply he is convinced of sin by the Holy Spirit, the more earnestly must he long for the heavenly state of glory, and of complete salvation, when all enemies shall be put under his feet, and he shall be more than conqueror through Christ who has loved him. Thus, whoever is convinced of sin by the Holy Spirit is led into all essential truths by the same divine Teacher ; and however dark and indistinct his views may be in many minor points, and however imperfect his perception may be, even in respect to these essential

truths, still he is led by the Spirit, and taught by the Spirit ; the true light is shining into his mind, and the dawn of endless glory is begun in his soul.

II. The reception or rejection of these essential truths, the depravity of man, the atonement and deity of the Saviour, and salvation by faith in its three stages, of justification, sanctification, and glory, divide the whole world into two classes, which it is of essential importance never to overlook or confound. The first class, by receiving these truths, become the heirs of the divine promises, and of the heavenly kingdom ; the second, who reject or neglect them, remain the heirs of wrath, and continue under the curse pronounced upon all flesh as transgressors of God's holy law. However similar they may be to each other for the present, they are as different, as the twilight of morning from that of evening ; the light of the one will grow brighter and brighter to the perfect day, while the gathering gloom of the other will deepen till it closes in utter darkness, unless they repent, and turn again to Him, who is the light of the world. This great division among mankind, it is the chief object of the adversary of souls to obscure. If Christians recognised each other as belonging to the same great body, of whom Christ is the living head, and as the children of the same heavenly Father, they would act together and pray together. United with the force of moral union, and combined under their heavenly leader, no obstacles nor enemies could withstand them ; they would go forth conquering and to conquer ; but

the enemy knows they would be irresistible if united, and, taking advantage of their corruptions and lusts, sows strifes and divisions amongst them, knowing that if a house be divided against itself it cannot stand.

The church indeed, as supported by an almighty arm, though divided against itself, has stood, but has not advanced; its existence is continued, but its progress and prosperity are checked. If the essentials of Christianity were alone presented to the public view, as that which truly constitutes religion, many would perceive their imminent danger, who think they may delay entering upon the Christian life, till Christians are agreed amongst themselves what Christianity really is. They would see that Christianity is contained in this simple declaration,—“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.”

III. Great is the folly of those who are united in essentials, and yet are perpetually disputing upon minor points. They see that the world around them are lying in wickedness; that they neither receive God's testimony concerning their own lost condition, nor concerning the divine gift of his Son. Unmoved by the fewness of those who believe in the word of life, many Christians are ready to make the number of believers still fewer, if they consent not to pronounce whatever shibboleth they may impose. They acknowledge that both they and their oppo-

nents hold in common all that is essential to salvation ; but they will not allow others to rest in peace, till they believe exactly as much, or as little, as they themselves do ; and yet, it is evident, they are taking the very measures that will make the breach between them still wider. The more men dispute, the less likely are they ever to agree. In an argument, it is not what the opponent is saying that is attended to but the answer which is to be given to him, that is considered. A dispute necessarily directs the attention of the contending parties to the points on which they differ, while friendly agreement, and a silence respecting disputed matters, as necessarily fix the mind on the points on which they agree. While opposition and argument in general strengthen errors, peace and silence have a tendency effectually to undermine them. One truth is connected with every other truth, and the peaceful contemplation of a few essential principles, has a tendency to lead the mind off that perverted train of thought, from which its errors arose. Most errors proceed from side views of the truth, and from a partial consideration of its bearings. Disputes make these views more partial still ; but the gentle admission of neutral truths, opens a wider prospect, and presents us with the just bearings and relations of things. There are antagonist truths, as well as there are antagonist muscles ; one truth advanced without limitation will always be disproportioned and out of its proper place, but its antagonist truth limits its action, and gives

it its just force. "Work out your own salvation, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do." Each of these truths taken separately would lead into error. Human works are necessary for working out our salvation, and a divine work is necessary, but the full truth results from their union, that our salvation is wrought out by divine and human co-operation.

Owing to the evil effects of disputes, one heresy almost always produces another. If one man sees another leaning too far, as he thinks, over a precipice, though he is in no danger himself, he throws back his own body as far in a contrary direction. Thus he who first detects another falling into heresy, recedes as far from the truth on the other side. Disputants, inflamed against each other, mutually withdraw from each other's errors, regardless that they are leaving the truth, from which they have both departed, in the middle between them; and each, looking only at the mistakes of the other, is confident that he must be in the right, because his opponent is in the wrong. But a spirit of conciliation, where no essential truth is attacked, draws both parties nearer to each other, and in all probability nearer to the truth.

IV. All who receive the Bible in sincerity have one faith, and will be led by the same spirit. All the more extensive errors in religion have proceeded from not conceding the supreme authority to the Bible, and from subjecting its interpretation to the

preconceived opinions of men, or to the narrowness of their unassisted faculties. More partial errors, arise from taking only a partial view of the Scriptures. But the sincerity of an inquirer after inspired truth, is made evident by this test, whether he is accommodating the Bible to his opinions, or subjecting all his opinions to the Bible. A sincere inquirer may be mistaken at first, but the more he inquires the less he will be deceived. An insincere inquirer, the more he inquires the more he will be deceived, because he wishes not so much to find truth, as to behold his own opinions reflected back to him from the inspired volume; and every day he will improve in the destructive art of wresting Scripture to his own views. But if a man submits his opinions to the authority of the Scriptures, we can have no doubt that he is a true Christian—that he is under the teaching of the Spirit, and that sooner or later he will be led into all the truth. With such a man we need have no dispute, we are disciples of the same Master, and subject to the same rule of life.

V. Besides, it is to be observed, that a variety of views by no means necessarily implies any diversity in our belief. Truth is one and the same, but the degree of evidence with which we may perceive it, and the mode of illustrating and applying it, may be very various, without any of that variety being attributable to error. The Creator delights in variety. Without going as far as Leibnitz, in his

identity of indiscernibles, we may, however agree with him, that not two leaves in the forest are exactly similar to each other. In the world of mind, the most excellent and complex of the works of the Creator, variety displays itself in still more inexhaustible abundance. Notwithstanding that many receive all their knowledge passively, and that the few who are inventing, derive the greater part of their information from others, still every mind shows its originality in giving the instruction it receives, a colouring of its own, and placing it in a point of view peculiar to itself. One is most struck by one argument, another by another. The topics which greatly affect one mind, fleet through a second, without leaving a trace of their passage. Some are most filled with a solemn admiration of the holiness of the divine character ; some are melted and overpowered by a sense of God's infinite love. Various portions of Scripture differently affect various minds, and even in the same mind variously at different times. But in all this variety there is no diversity, as long as men are held together by the unity of the same spirit. Though various, they still remain members one of another, and all members have not the same office, nor the same gifts, nor the same points of view from which they contemplate divine truth. It is this very variety which fits them for mutual edification, as long as the principle of charity and peace prevails ; but let charity wax cold, and that which was intended for food is converted into poison. Variety of views is changed into diversity

of opinions ; every one is determined that the religious world shall be shaped exactly after his own image, and that all other Christians shall think, feel and speak as he does himself, or incur a sentence of condemnation. A principle of repulsion succeeds to the principle of attraction. He who forms a party and a peculiar creed, not only injures himself and his followers, but his opponents also. His heresy gives rise to an opposite heresy in them, and the truth is torn asunder betwixt them. On the contrary, love allows, admires, and consecrates to the service of man, and to the glory of God, every variety of gifts and of views ; views which, though various, all terminate in the central and supporting truths of Christianity. And while party spirit turns variety into jangling and discord ; love unites variety with uniformity—that union which is the seal of all the divine works, and the evidence of the Divine existence.

VI. Not only the partial insisting upon some truth, but even the undue importance assigned to some rite or institution, has been productive of many heresies. Many do not distinguish between the essentials of Christianity, and its accessories ; they lay almost as much stress upon a mean as upon an end ; upon that which is relatively good, as upon that which is absolutely so. Christianity consists of truth, of holiness, and of happiness. That the truth should be presented before the mind, and continually kept there, by human means, and by divine aid, is

all that Christianity can require. To contribute to this end we have two signs, baptism and the Lord's supper, answerable to the two parts of salvation which are carrying on on earth, justification and sanctification, the washing away of sin, and the living by faith upon the Lord Jesus. Concerning the things signified by these signs, there is no dispute amongst those who take the Bible for their guide; concerning the mode of administering these signs, there are endless controversies amongst inquirers after truth, who, to all appearance, are equally sincere. Whatever is important in the Scriptures is clear in proportion to its importance; we may conclude therefore, that the signification of these signs is highly important, but that the mode of administering them is not so, because very doubtful. It is clear that every one should be allowed to choose for himself, and to use the sign in that way which most directly carries the mind to the thing signified. Controversy here is entirely out of place. It makes the sign of no effect, it distracts the attention from the thing signified, which alone is the useful contemplation, to the mode in which the sign is administered, which is altogether an unprofitable subject of thought; for the use of a sign is, that the mind may pass immediately from it, to the thing signified. Thus these signs not being received in peace and faith, but being continually disputed about, are to controversialists, not so much the signs of salvation, as the emblems of a peculiar party.

Nearly the same observations apply to disputes about church government. Government is not a thing valuable in itself; it is only the means of attaining some valuable end, and has therefore no excellency apart from its utility. The end of churches, and, of course, of church government, is to display and perpetuate religious truth throughout all generations. It is a matter of some difficulty, as we have already observed, to ascertain the exact form of the apostolic churches; what we know best of their structure is, that they were exceedingly simple, and that these little "republics," as Gibbon well calls them, owed their prosperity less to any positive and municipal regulations, than to their innate energy and freedom. But suppose that we had a precise model handed down from the times of the Apostles, its whole excellency would consist in its aptitude to preserve and to spread the truth, and if, instead of directing our eyes to the gospel, it withdrew our attention to contemplate its own structure, so far, it would be not only useless, but hurtful.

VII. Sects, however deplorable, are evils which counteract still greater evils. They have their present use, and will cease at the moment when they become no longer useful. All human institutions, like man himself, have their determined periods of existence, and pass from the energy of their early growth to their full maturity, and certain, though gradual decay. Religious institutions and bodies follow the same law, and it seems impossible to trans-

mit the zeal of their first founders and advocates, to their distant successors. A gradual languor creeps over ancient establishments ; they require continual renewals of life ; or other denominations spring up to supply their vacant place, and to run the same career of energy, prosperity, and decay. It is not that the change is immediately visible to the outward eye, and the form may long remain after the spirit has fled, and opinions may continue to be professed when they are no longer accompanied by the same intimate conviction. But the truths which are still professed, are either neglected, or imperfectly brought forward, until they again meet with a new advocate, and have the public attention again strongly directed to them. Then the keenness of dispute, and the eagerness of controversy, supply the place of the love of truth, and will not suffer the understanding to slumber in total listlessness. Thus neglected truths are brought forward with full prominence, if not in their fair and just proportion ; and the heat produced by discussion is better than the total numbness of death, though it cannot be compared with the warmth and life which are derived from a higher source. But when a larger influence is vouchsafed from the Divine Spirit ; and the minds of men are led into all truth by their divine Guide, there will be no need of the fires of controversy, while his pure and peaceful light is shining every where around us. When all are cherishing the truth for its own sake, the weapons of controversy will be thrown aside as useless, and

sects will cease, for there will be no further occasion for them : earnestness for the truth will supersede all party zeal for peculiar opinions, and full knowledge of the truth will set aside all partial views.

VIII. What a number of differences would immediately be terminated by Christians adhering to the apostolic rule, of walking together as far as they are agreed. The very first result would be that they would find many more points of agreement existing between them, than they had previously suspected. And every day's observance of the rule would make the agreement greater. They would understand each other better ; and, what is more, they would understand themselves. Their own views of the truth would become much clearer, and walking in the atmosphere of peace and love, heavenly objects and divine truths would grow more distinctly visible to their view.

It must however be owned, that there are some men with whom it is impossible to walk together along the road of life, and yet to avoid either disputes, or seeming acquiescence in their unscriptural fancies. There are men whose turn of mind is decidedly heretical, who will make a party to themselves at all events ; and who, continually bending the Scriptures to their own notions, must ever involve in discussion all who have the misfortune to be near them, and who will not veer about in opinion at the same moment that they do. There is no other way open for peace and edification, but keeping separate from

such men, and declining all participation in their vain janglings, as the Apostle Paul warns Timothy. Indeed, nothing is more unprofitable and adverse to the heavenly life than these endless discussions, as we may see by the frequency of the warnings of St. Paul's Epistles, and his earnest admonitions.

While we justly complain of these differences, (so contrary to the genius of the Gospel, yet prevailing and multiplying throughout the Christian world,) every one ought to ask himself whether he has done all that lay in his power to prevent them, whether he has followed the apostolic remedy of walking with others, as far as they are agreed, nor will their distance and unwillingness to accompany him be a sufficient reason why he should not make the trial, and persevere in the rule as far as lies within his power.

IX. There are many forms of Christianity at present existing, but none of them is that universal form which will ultimately prevail. None of them have the characters of the Catholic faith about them. We have the confessions of the most eminent men, of each denomination, that a new spirit, and a new energy must arise, before Christianity can possess itself of that boundless empire over the earth, which is decreed to it in the fullness of time. A religion of truth and love, unfettered by local circumstances, and adapted, without restriction of country and climate, to the minds of men, and the wants of the human race, is the only one that can expect universal dominion. A religion that trusts not for support to an

arm of flesh, nor comes with outward pomp and observation, that wears not the badge of any party, nor is tinged with the hue of any peculiar systems or opinions, but which is free and liberal as the infinite love and mercy of its Author, and as pure from any obliquity, or contractedness of vision, as his infinite understanding.

Remote as this large and flourishing state of religion may appear, each one may begin this universal form of Christianity for himself, determining to call no man master upon earth, and knowing no other division, but of those who receive the Gospel, and of those who obey not the truth. He whose heart is filled with love to God, and towards all men, whose understanding is guided by the word of God, and not by the opinions of men, and who walks in the liberty with which Christ has made him free, is truly a Catholic believer ; and as the reign of Christ has begun in his heart, so the free and genuine spirit of Christianity is governing his understanding. There is no need of any controversy or outward change ; the genius of true religion has but to extend its influence from such individuals to whole communities, and Christianity will appear in its native form and original lustre, and assume the sovereignty that is destined to it, till the end of time.

X. If the union of the Christian body has long been dissolved, and the parts are separated from each other, and scattered into a variety of fragments, it is altogether owing to the want of charity. What uni-

versal gravitation is in the natural world, universal love is in the moral world ; while it draws the hosts of created minds towards the centre of the universe, it keeps all the smaller portions of each system in their due place, and maintains undisturbed the harmony of the whole. There needs nothing but the principle of love, to reduce the confusion of the Christian world into order, and to bring back every part of the system into its proper place. There need be no change of opinion or protracted discussion amongst those who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus ; mutual charity alone would be sufficient, silently, and imperceptibly, to divest them of any peculiarities, that mar the fair proportions of the truth. In the absence of dispute, the fundamental principles of Christianity will regain the large space which they ought to occupy in the mind, and differences upon minor points will be cast into the shade, and either forgotten or rejected. All sects that exist among true Christians, are merely partial aberrations from the truth. One turns aside to the right, and another to the left hand, and a principle of sectarian repulsion keeps them alike remote from each other, and from the common centre where they should unite and repose. But universal charity would again draw them together, and the point where they would all meet, is the same point where all the rays of truth converge with their full effulgence.

XI. But to incite Christians to love one another, more than a voice of human persuasion is needed.

The Holy Spirit must rest upon every heart, shedding there, in no common measure, the love of Christ, and consequently the love of Christians also. This divine influence can only be expected in the renovating and universal energy of the latter-day glory, in answer to the continued and united supplications of all believers. They who fervently pray for the teaching of the Spirit, do more for the removal of heresies, than those who silence a heretic, and convince him of his errors by argument. If all the leaders of parties were removed, unless the spirit of party were removed also, nothing would be done to purpose: new opinions would immediately spring up, and perhaps still more grievous errors. But the teaching of the Divine Spirit, and his power of effectually convincing, cut off the causes and the roots of errors, enlighten the understanding, enlarge the heart, and guide and strengthen all the powers of the mind in the pursuit of wisdom, and in the joyful contemplation of the truth. For every word that it is necessary to speak to men on the subject of errors, let us address another to God, and our refutations of heresy will be successful indeed. All differences will fade away in the rising light that will overspread the earth, and all varieties of ignorance will only be remembered as the fleeting shadows of a darkness that is departed.

XII. Though the Spirit is the supreme agent, in all those changes which are coming over the world, still he will work as hitherto, by the employment of a variety of means; and of these instruments, none

will have a wider influence than inductive philosophy, not only in the truths which it discovers, but also by the temper of mind which it forms. The schools of ancient philosophy resounded with disputes, every position was questionable, and every question gave rise to a new opinion. Philosophy wore a new aspect in every new sect; nothing was stable or permanent; the veil remained as thickly spread over nature as before; the mind gained in strength, but not in discovery. Nothing was obtained but matter for fresh arguments and endless controversy. But since experience has been taken as the sure guide to truth, and inductive philosophy has succeeded to the scholastic sophistry of the darker ages, the voice of disputation is hushed, and instead of noisy and perpetual janglings, there is the quiet and ever-progressive discovery of nature. Instead of the arrogant presumption of the old philosophers, confident in their ignorance, there is the child-like docility of men, who, though they have discovered much, far from being presumptuous from what they have already obtained, are proceeding with unabated caution step by step, slowly, but perseveringly, to the remoter results of science. The same spirit introduced into religion, will be equally favourable to peace and truth in studying the word of God. That narrow and contentious spirit which is barren of truth, but fruitful in controversy, will be every where discountenanced; and it will be the aim of all to receive the doctrines of the Scriptures in their genuine import, pure and

unsophisticated, without any mixture of the opinions of men.

XIII. General and religious education will be another great instrument of preserving the world from new heresies. Many errors have arisen from preconceived opinions, but education will preoccupy the mind with truth. It is an unspeakable advantage to receive, with child-like simplicity, and in early years, the exact impression of religious knowledge. The good seed of the word has time to strike its roots deep before error springs up, and before the vanity of becoming the interpreter of a peculiar set of opinions, or of being either the leader, or the follower, of a party, can have place. There are no dark or unoccupied places of the understanding, where errors may have room to lurk, and time to gather strength ; but the mind, from the first, draws all its opinions from the Bible, and has its thoughts assimilated to the minds of Prophets and Apostles. Numbers of foolish fancies are discountenanced, as soon as they present themselves, by a general and continued acquaintance with the Bible, and novelty and fickleness of opinion lose their charms, to one long imbued with scriptural truth. The train of thoughts has been too long used to run in the right channel, to be easily disturbed from it ; and the mind, by habit as well as affection, is for ever united to those sound and glorious doctrines, which contain the promise and the principle of an immortal life.

XIV. The word of God being made the companion and guide of our thoughts, and being brought with a divine energy to every soul, will chase far off every shade of darkness and error. Instead of conforming it to their own opinions, men will be ever studying to conform every thought to its holy and unchangeable standard. They will carry about with them, in their own hearts, the stamp of its truth, and its heavenly origin; and their thoughts will blend with the inspired light which it affords them. All errors are traceable to ignorance or neglect of revelation; or to men accommodating its doctrines to their own fancy, or inclination; but in the latter days, when its authority shall be by all deemed paramount, and without appeal, when it shall be received as the voice of God himself, and be listened to with holy affection, and acted upon with pious zeal, error can have no place, either in thought or action. Continual reading will be accompanied with continual prayer, and the word will ever be attended with the influence of the Spirit. It will, then, indeed, drop as the rain, and distil as the dew, bringing forth the fruits of immortality, till the whole earth becomes the garden of the Lord, and there be no more remaining spots of barrenness, or vestiges of a wilderness; but the whole earth shall yield her increase, and be filled with an abundant harvest, and resound with songs of joy and praise.

XV. The study of the works of God will no longer be separated from the study of the word of God. Many of the discoveries in nature have been made by men, who overlooked its Author, who even denied his being, and trampled upon his laws. Where truth does not convince, it hardens, and the mind acquires a facility of avoiding a conclusion, at which it is determined never to arrive. Numbers of Atheists have prosecuted the two studies which most abound with proofs of the divine existence, anatomy and astronomy. The mind is free, and though design naturally leads to a designer, yet the mind can rest in the contemplation of design, and go no further, and the more frequently design is presented to its notice, the more perfectly it can acquire the habit of turning aside its view from the truth of the divine existence, which that design demonstrates. Thus, men, without a feeling of absurdity, can talk of laws, and yet deny the being of a lawgiver; and admire the order of nature, and yet speak with contempt of the notion of an ordainer. But this will not always continue; the time will come when praise shall be offered up to God by all the intelligent observers of his works, and all the attainments of philosophers, who overlooked the Author of nature, and who desired not the knowledge of his ways, shall come into the possession of men, who will celebrate the praises of the Most High, and give him thanks for the discoveries which he vouchsafes

of himself, whether in nature, or in grace. God will then be honoured in all his works, and every talent and faculty be consecrated to his service. Nature will appear as a vast volume laid open, more or less, before all men, and inscribed with the being, the power, and the perfection, of its Author ; and the healthful and enlarged understanding, which the study of nature produces, will not be without its beneficial effects, when brought to the contemplation of the word of God. The style of the same Author is discernible both in revelation and in nature, and an acquaintance with one contributes to the knowledge of the other, and both are equally averse from that minute and disputatious turn of mind, which subsists on ingenious sophistry and verbal subtleties ; but which disappears, in the contemplation of the magnitude of creation, and in the earnest hope of the glories which are to be revealed hereafter.

XVI. A state of the world, and of the minds of men, which supposes a new influence, changing and renovating all things, requires strong evidence before it can be believed. And this evidence we have in every part of the Bible, for wherever we open it, we find promises of a glory and blessedness upon earth, which are still future. Indeed, all the promises of Scripture have respect to this state of millennial felicity ; for, though they have had their partial accomplishments, they wait for their complete fulfilment

till the time that the Messiah's empire be established, and the stone cut out without hands become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth. Then the sceptre of Christ's universal kingdom shall be a sceptre of righteousness, and the words shall be fully accomplished, that are spoken of him as the Messiah in the forty-fifth Psalm. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." Then God shall have taken away all his wrath, and turned himself from the fierceness of his anger. Then shall all nations whom he has made come and worship before him, and shall glorify his name. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Then shall the Spirit be poured out upon all flesh, and all shall know the Lord, from the least of them unto the greatest of them. It is impossible for us to expect too highly concerning the Millennium. We may see promises scattered throughout the sacred volume, concerning it, in endless profusion, and conceived in the most emphatic language. Glorious things are indeed spoken of the latter days, and of the happiness that is awaiting the generations to come ; and of the ages of knowledge, stability, and peace, that are to follow each other in long succession. Then the gates of the church shall be open continually ; they shall not be shut day nor night, the men may bring unto it the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. Then it shall be said unto Zion, the sun shall be no

more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. And thy people also shall be all righteous ; they shall inherit the land for ever. The branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.

XVII. The moral world is still in a state of confusion and chaos, undergoing those changes and revolutions which are preparatory to its being brought into a state of order. The design of Providence at present is to “overturn, overturn, overturn,” till He comes to whom the dominion by right belongs. It is in vain that men strive to raise up empires for themselves ; their kingdoms are broken one after another, like waves upon a stormy sea. Yet, in the midst of confusion, order is beginning to appear. The foundations of the Messiah’s empire are laid ; and if nothing is permanent in this world’s affairs, all things are in progress, and hasten on to the final event. We have the germ, but not the disclosure, of the future condition of the world. True science has commenced its career, though it is still in its rudiments. The greater part of the time that has been spent, has been wasted in the vain struggles of erroneous philosophy. True knowledge is but of yesterday ; but even already new powers are produced for commanding nature, and new prospects dawn upon society. All things are ready for the great and consummating change, except

the hearts of Christians. May the Holy Spirit stir them up to fervent and effectual prayer, deliver them from all errors, and enlarge their minds to receive the Gospel in all its divine freedom and fullness, that they may become meet to share in the triumph and the dominion which is awaiting all the friends and followers of the truth.

END OF ERRORS REGARDING RELIGION.

THOUGHTS

ON

P R A Y E R

AT

THE PRESENT TIME.

THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

AT THE PRESENT TIME.

THERE is a general opinion that some great change is about to take place in European society. In this view, writers of very different turns of mind, and who draw their conclusions from very various sources of information, are agreed. This of itself would give some colour of probability to the opinion which they entertain ; but the conviction that great changes are about to arrive, is strengthened by every view of society which can be taken. Whether we regard its outward circumstances and temporal welfare, or the revolution of opinions and the state of moral principles which generally prevail, the world is evidently in a state of transition ; the old channels of prosperity are choked up, and the tide of affairs is about to flow in new currents. The old governments of Europe are unsuitable to the new circumstances and new opinions of Europe ; the war of opinion, though there may be periods of neutrality, is already begun ; and the warfare of opposing forces must at some

period, whether near or more distant, inevitably follow.

We know from prophecy that the kingdoms of Europe are utterly to be broken in pieces, at least all those who are in any way confederate with Popery, and which support the iron yoke of superstition, by tyranny either civil or ecclesiastical. But there is hope of escape for this country, which has renounced all usurpation over the rights of conscience, and has so far come out of Babylon, and kept itself separate from that iniquitous oppression of God's people, which will most assuredly bring down the vengeance of the Most High.

Still there are many circumstances in the situation of this country which are any thing but favourable. The English throw away the advantages of the situation which God has given them, and are perpetually involving themselves in the quarrels and bloodshed of Europe ; and this not with a design of imparting their own liberty and freedom to the oppressed, but with the continual purpose of supporting those very tyrannies, those civil and religious powers, that oppose themselves to the progress of true Christianity, and which God has declared shall be destroyed. So that even if vengeance were not coming upon the English for their own sins, they would place themselves in the path of the destroying angel, that they might share in the punishments that are coming upon the sins of others.

The corruption that is spreading through both the extremes of society in England, the higher and the lower, is also a very dark and threatening sign. Crimes prevail in this country which denote the last period of national corruption, and which have already marked out to former nations their approaching doom. In many instances the features which were once thought to constitute the national character seem almost effaced, and in the corruption of too numerous a body amongst the rich, and the degradation and miseries of the lowest poor, instead of beholding the descendants of the ancient English, we might rather trace a resemblance to the profligate and wretched inhabitants of the south of Europe.

The long suffering of God in times past, though it may give rise to hopes, is no foundation for complete security. The crimes of former generations, though past over for a time by the Divine forbearance, are not forgotten, and the longer punishment is delayed, the heavier will it fall upon that generation who are filling up the measure of their forefathers' guilt, except they avert the anger of God by timely repentance.

The chief strength of every nation consists in the middle class, those to whom God has granted Agur's prayer, and given them neither poverty nor riches. This class is more numerous in England than in any other country of the old world, and they still retain much of the ancient mind and morals of England. But the circumstances of the times have a tendency

to thin this sound portion of the population ; the contamination of unprincipled wealth must reach the few who are more prosperous, and the many who are depressed by the adverse circumstances of the country, sink down to the lower extreme of society, and augment the wretchedness, without raising the standard of principle of those amongst whom they are mingled.

Knowing that the presence of ten righteous persons would have suspended the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, we may find much comfort in considering the number of those who in this country are righteous indeed, who have put on the robes of the Saviour's righteousness, and who live by faith on him alone. But the hopes from this quarter might with reason have been greater some years ago. The prospect of religion were then much brighter, Christians were more of one heart and mind, they had given up many idle disputes, and were silent, if not convinced, respecting many hurtful errors. God who judgeth the hearts, knows how much of sincerity and truth there was in their endeavours to spread the Gospel of the Saviour ; there was at least a great appearance of zeal for the Divine cause.

But now, not only has no considerable progress been made in the great work ; there are apparent the usual marks of decay. The enemy has been successful in his wonted device of stirring up strife between those who were once considered as eminent fellow-labourers, workers together with God for the salvation of the world. Disputes as to the measures

for spreading religion have, as is usual in the course of things from bad to worse, been followed by disputes relating to the doctrines or religion, and, in the midst of strife and contention, the Spirit of holiness and peace, it is to be feared, is less felt and listened to, and is preparing to withdraw, in some degree at least, his reviving influence.

Such at least has been the history of many past times of refreshing from on high. The work of love and mercy has been terminated by the unholy strivings and emulations, by the partizanship and the divisions of former ages. And what is deserving much of consideration, these revivals of religion have often gone before the destruction of the nations in which they took place. Thus, the revivals in the times of Hezekiah and Josiah preceded the Babylonish captivity, and the pouring out of the Spirit in the days of Apostles was the precursor of the long desolation of Judea. Thus the angels restrain the winds till the elect are gathered in, and thus nations become fitted for judgment by the Gospel being faithfully preached, those who receive it being gathered into the ark of mercy, and those who reject the offer of salvation being ripe for immediate punishment.

Every thing at the present moment depends upon prayer ; if prayer is restrained, the reviving work of the Spirit is restrained also, religion will gradually decay, and Britain will follow the fate of the nations that have gone to ruin before it, and which from

neglecting their appointed day of repentance, are monuments to all succeeding ages, that God, though long suffering, limits the term of his forbearance, saying now is the appointed time, now is the day of salvation. But if prayer be abundantly poured out before God, that of itself would be a sign and a pledge that this country is not only to be spared but made a chief instrument in promoting the Divine purposes, and in forwarding the glory of the latter days. It is true that many are the societies now in operation for spreading the Gospel, but small is the result of all their labour and expenditure. This is partly to be ascribed to their measures being ill advised and imperfectly arranged, but most of all to the influence of the Divine Spirit not accompanying their efforts. For considerable success in former times has attended much smaller means, and these too not directed by any remarkable sagacity. One great reason why small means are not unfrequently honoured with signal success, while large resources are often wasted away, is this, that in the first case, men have no temptation to trust in an arm of flesh, but in the latter case they often feel confident in the sums of money they amass, and the number of labourers they employ. In the first case, the glory is altogether ascribed to God ; in the second, men are more disposed to share in the honour of whatever success has been obtained.

In the first revival of religion, much good is often done, and without the same resources and efforts,

and apparently without any signal earnestness, amongst numbers united in prayer. There are few indeed at such times to pray ; most are in a languid and decaying condition, and the more benumbed and dead any one is, the less he feels his deadness. At such times it becomes the free mercy of God to crown the feeblest efforts with distinguished success, for in the almost entire absence of human means, the work, it is evident to all, is Divine. But since it is the great object of God, in the scheme of redemption, to cast a stain upon all human excellence, that no flesh may glory in his presence, the case is different when the labourers are many and the resources large ; it then becomes the Divine sovereignty to give success chiefly in proportion to prayer,—prayer which is an acknowledgment that God is every thing, and that the creature is nothing.

Means are the appointment of God, and all the resources in the world are of his creation ; all of them are therefore to be used with thanksgiving in the great work of converting the world. But God is not the God of nature only, but of grace also, and we must have equal regard to his renovating Spirit as to his creating power. He who uses means without all prayer and supplication, and he who prays without using every means afforded to him, both come short of their duty. It is the union of prayer and of the wise use of means which alone places us in the station which we ought to occupy. Then, indeed, we may expect the Divine blessing, and that

we shall be more than conquerors when God himself is making bare his holy arm, and taking to himself the victory.

Of ourselves we can do nothing ; is it, then, our duty to wait, in utter helplessness, for some sudden and unasked-for display of Divine power on our side ? No. Now is the accepted time, for prayer as well as for faith. As salvation is complete, and as the work was finished upon the cross, and as whoever believes in the Saviour hath from that moment eternal life, and enters into the foretaste, if not the fullness, of heavenly rest : so he that asketh in faith, from that moment receives, though the fulfilment of his petition may not be made sensible to him till some distant period.

We can do nothing without Divine assistance ; but prayer is the appointed medium by which we are to receive help from on high. If we ask much, we shall receive much ; if our success is small, it is evident that our prayers have been few, or that we have not prayed aright : for many pray much, and ask amiss, seeking for a blessing on their own errors and perversions of the truth.

In prayer we have the greatest encouragement from the Divine character and goodness. God is more ready to give than we to ask. He first holds out to us heavenly blessings, and then prompts us to pray for them. God is sovereign, and manifests his sovereignty by the free and unrestricted distribution of his gifts : but he is pre-eminently the hearer

and answerer of prayer ; and while he is found of those who seek him not, and bountiful even to those who ask not, still more abundantly will he confer his benefits upon those who wait on him in faith and supplication, and who look up to him as the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift.

We have thus the greatest encouragement to pray, the more we consider the attributes of God. We might as well doubt his truth and his word, as hesitate whether or not he will accomplish those petitions which faith presents to him ; and the experience of all ages shows, that God is not only the answerer of prayer, but that he fulfils the desires of his people in so remarkable a manner, that sense, as well as faith, bears testimony to his goodness and truth. He may appear to delay for a season ; but it is for the trial of our sincerity, and the exercise of our faith and patience. We shall reap in due time, if we faint not ; the longer the delay, the larger will be the harvest. God is never forgetful of the petitions of his people ; even if they have forgotten their own prayers, and despaired of obtaining them. God is still mindful of them, and is preparing to give them a more ample accomplishment.

When we think of the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, our first thoughts are naturally directed towards the heathen ; but the first object should be, the increase of religion amongst believers themselves. They are the depositories of the message of Divine mercy ; to them is committed the word of salvation.

and they are commanded by the Saviour to carry it to the extremities of the world. They are not only the instructors, but the examples of mankind. If the Gospel has little effect upon them ; if they exhibit little of the character of Christ ; if their understandings are darkened ; if their affections are earthly and selfish ; if the spirit of prayer is not largely poured out upon them—how can we expect any change for the better in the world at large ? The revival must begin amongst themselves : they are the weapons which God employs to subdue the world to the kingdom of his Son ; and when Christ goes forth conquering and to conquer, they must receive from him an edge and temper for their spiritual warfare and their predicted victory.

Our first duty is, to pray for the spirit of prayer. By repeated acts of believing, however feeble at first, and by continuance in belief, a strong faith and a constant reliance are obtained ; and by prayers, however wandering and broken at their commencement, the spirit, at last, of fervent and effectual prayer is poured out upon us from on high,—of prayer which, uniting experience to faith, joins thanksgivings for former mercies to the unwavering expectation of future benefits. Thus it is in the nature of prayer, to spread out in its progress, continually enlarging as it proceeds ; former prayers obtaining more of the spirit of prayer, and the Divine Spirit urging and bearing forward our spirits into increased supplications for larger discoveries of the

Divine goodness, and new confirmations of the Divine promises.

Believers have much need to pray that their mutual faith may be strengthened. There is much unscriptural faith in the world, confidence and presumption, that have no connexion with the word of God. But that faith which relies simply on God's word, is alone scriptural, and of Divine origin, and this faith can only be maintained and increased by the Divine Spirit, which first implanted it in man. Thus true faith and true prayer must always go together, faith must be nourished by prayer, and prayer must rest upon faith.

If strong faith is not common, large and Christian love is still less so, and yet love must greatly prevail amongst Christians before Christianity can be triumphant in the world. Our Saviour has affirmed, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye love one another." These words still remain to be fulfilled. Even in the Apostles' time there were many divisions and schisms, and since the days of the Apostles this mark of the true church and of true believers has been still less visible. It is true that individuals have no power to remove either the faults of individual Christians, or the heresies and schisms of Christians when congregated into distinct bodies. Still our duty remains the same, and we are bound to love all other believers, not because they are lovely in themselves, but because Christ has loved them, and has given himself for

them. Thus our path in every case is clear and open ; we have only to act ourselves in the way in which we would wish all others to act, and to pray that the spirit of love would rest upon them and upon us, in order that we might both be Christ's disciples indeed, and that all men might also see that we were his disciples.

But if we have much reason to pray for the spirit of prayer, and that our feeble faith should be strengthened, and that love now so much marred and hindered, should abound, we have still more urgent cause to pray for a lively and scriptural hope, perhaps at present the least exercised of the Christian graces. The world is living by hope, looking forward to futurity as the bestower of some imaginary good ; without hope this world would lose its hold on the affections, and it is hope alone which makes this present life desirable. But all these hopes are false, and futurity is propitious to the believer alone. Christianity is the religion of hope ; this world is not the world of a Christian. He dies to this life, that he may live to Christ. Every step that he takes in the way of duty is along the path of hope, a path leading to a better and a brighter world. If hope, then, be not in vigorous exercise, the whole form of Christianity must be marred and impaired. If in this life only the Christian had hope, his comfort would be small indeed. But his joy and triumph consists in the glorious hope of immortality, and this hope can only be planted and nourished by the Holy Spirit, who

gives to us the promise and earnest of the promised possession, and who fulfils his office of Comforter, by imparting to the mind, in the midst of suffering and mortality, the foretaste of heavenly felicity.

But not only is the need great that private Christians should pray for themselves, and for others, but also that congregations should unite their joint supplications, that the word of God should have free course and be glorified ; that the Divine Scriptures should appear not to be feeble like the writings of men, but indeed to be the power of God unto salvation. Perhaps at few times has the transforming efficacy of the Spirit less attended the proclaiming of the Gospel, in proportion to the distinguished talents and piety of several who preach it, than at present. It is a striking display of the corruption of human nature, and of its utter helplessness, (or rather of its utter want of will to receive the truth,) to behold numbers listening to plain and powerful preaching, assenting to all that they hear, and admiring the discourses which exclude them from every other ground of confidence except the cross of Christ, and yet to behold them, year after year, without making one step in advance towards salvation, and the Gospel all the while becoming to them a savour of death unto death. Yet ministers and the believing part of the congregation look upon this state as the ordinary course of affairs, as that which may be deplored but cannot be remedied, and never perseveringly in-

quire why it is that the Gospel is no longer the power of salvation amongst them.

The reason of this want of success consists in the whole of Christianity not being brought prominently forward. Christ, indeed, is plainly set forth, and the truth of the Gospel is earnestly proposed to the hearers, but although all Christians are aware that the truth itself is not effectual to the conversion of souls, unless the Divine Spirit bring that word which he once dictated to Prophets and Apostles, home to the heart of each individual sinner; yet united prayer for Divine assistance does not occupy so conspicuous a place in the public services of religion, as the preaching of Christ crucified, though both are essentially necessary, and unless the Spirit take of the things of Christ and show them with a Divine power unto the soul, all preaching must be vain.

The abundant outpouring of the Spirit is the distinguishing peculiarity of Christianity. Though Christ spake as never man spake, the same success did not attend his preaching as, afterwards, that of his Apostles, because the Spirit from on high was not poured out in the full measure of the Christian dispensation till Christ had ascended up on high to receive gifts for men, and the best of all gifts, the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Christianity all things are prepared and ready; there need be no delay and no uncertainty. We receive the Holy Spirit when we ask it, as we put on the righteousness of the Lord

Jesus as soon as we believe. Unless we ask for the Spirit in preserving prayer, and unless the assistance of the Spirit is inculcated as one of the essential and vital parts of Christianity, and if prayer is not held to be of the same importance as preaching, Christianity cannot be said to be fully proclaimed, the Gospel is mutilated, and an eminent portion of the truth is not brought fully into view. It is not enough for the full influence of the truth that believers hear the Gospel, and receive the word mixed with faith; they must receive it mixed with continual prayer, knowing that, though we are saved by the truth, it is when the truth is made effectual by the Divine energy accompanying it. Did the Spirit of truth more accompany the word of truth, how different would be the effects of preaching; and to attain this blessed result, nothing else is wanting than that continual preaching should be accompanied by continual prayer.

The reason why more success does not attend the preaching of the Gospel in this country, is simply this, that success is not expected, as Mr. Fuller justly observes. Christians go forth to their warfare not with an expectation of victory but of defeat. It excites no earnest and persevering inquiry and supplication when the Gospel is no longer the power of God unto salvation in a congregation where it has been faithfully preached. The case is different in America, there they expect success, and, accordingly, they have it, for expectation leads to prayer, and

earnest and persevering prayer to the obtaining of all their petitions. Here, while they count their converts by tens, they count them by hundreds in America. And even in America their views require to be much enlarged. As yet they are but beginning to receive those gracious showers from on high; we trust they will go on from strength to strength, experiencing more of the Lord's goodness, and encouraged by past success to seek for larger communications of the Divine Spirit.

The great step is to expect success, to receive with faith the Divine promises, to be alive to the miserable condition of a world lying in wickedness, and to unite with the use of every means, and the continual preaching of the cross of Christ, prayer without ceasing for all conditions of men, for believers and unbelievers, for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ at home and abroad.

Since the beginning of the world, could any one of the innumerable millions of mankind assert that he had prayed in faith, and according to the will of God, and had not in due time received an answer to his petition? The mere supposition is absurd, and contrary to the Divine character. God ever has been and ever will be, the hearer and answerer of prayer. Has Christ crucified been preached year after year with small success? has he been lifted up on the cross without drawing all men to him? the deficiency is obvious; the remedy is at hand. Let fervent prayer be as abundant as faithful preaching; and

then God has promised and pledged himself that he will pour out his Spirit abundantly, and that the words of salvation shall meet not only the outward ear, but be written in living characters on the hearts of the hearers.

Believers in a congregation have a great duty to perform. They ought never to hear a sermon without praying *before* it, that the preacher may be abundantly taught of the Holy Spirit, that God would put suitable words into his mouth, and bring those words with power to the hearers' hearts. Believers should pray *with* the minister while he is preaching, listen in the attitude of prayer as well as of faith, and they should pray *after* the speaker has ceased; that the seed sown may strike root upon good ground, prepared by the Holy Spirit, to yield some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold.

It is the duty of ministers, above all things, to seek the aid of the prayers of the believers among their congregation, not in a general way, by merely recommending it, but by pressing it upon them in private as well as in public, always inculcating that it is by the prayer of the people that ministers are strengthened for the work, that souls are won to Christ, and redeemed from destruction, and that religion flourishes or decays according as supplications and thanksgivings are poured out or restrained before God. How earnestly does St. Paul seek for the prayers of his converts; he is not content to pray without ceasing for them; he urges them again to

be urgent in their intercessions for him, and to their supplications he attributes his deliverances and his success.

Thus, the abundant out-pouring of the spirit of prayer would give a new life to whatever congregation should fully perceive, that without Divine aid, nothing can be done, and that if prayer is withheld, the copious effusion of the Divine Spirit will be withheld also. Then they would know that God was with them of a truth, that the written word was but the sword of the Spirit, and that the sword wielded by an Almighty arm was triumphing over all opposition, and proceeding from victory to victory. Neither would these blessed effects be confined to the congregation in which they arose ; others would hear that God was accompanying the word spoken with a divine energy. New hopes would spring up ; and with hope, prayer and confidence would revive ; all would be waiting upon God, looking up on high for those reviving showers of grace that were about to descend upon the thirsty and parched up land. The ministers of the Gospel, however eminent in gifts at the present time, would appear endued with new power from above, more amply furnished for every good word and work, and having an effectual door opened to them, and ever kept open, and more widely opened by the increased spirit of waiting upon God, and by the abundance of petitions and thanksgivings that were daily presented to him. By the fervency of prayer, new ministers, of high and

diversified attainments, would be thrust forth to the work of the Gospel; new Calvins and Luthers; nay, even another Paul and another Apollos; for the promise stands fast, that, in the latter days, the weakest Christian shall be as David, and David as the Angel of the Lord. Had we the prayer without ceasing of the Apostles and their converts, these would bring back to us the graces of the apostolical times; nay more, they would open out to us the glory of the latter days.

In urging the imperative importance of prayer, there is no wish to derogate in any thing from the absolute necessity of preaching the cross of Christ. Oh that Christ were preached more frequently, more freely, more fully, more certainly; that the Gospel trumpet of Jubilee should be ever sounding through our land, in tones so clear and certain, that none, unless wilfully, could misapprehend them! Yet, seeing that none will believe on the Saviour, except the Spirit draw him, that however clearly and distinctly Christ may be offered to all, none will believe on him, or accept the offer, it is evident that prayer is as necessary as preaching; that, without earnest and continual prayer, we have no reason to imagine, either from past experience, or from the nature of the Gospel itself, that preaching will ever be widely effectual.

Of all benevolent purposes, that of urging others to pray is the greatest, and most conducive to the furtherance of all other designs, and to the general

welfare of the world. If it is important that children should be taught in sabbath schools, that the poor should have the Gospel preached to them, still more important is it that all men should be taught by the Divine Spirit, that the Gospel should be written in living characters on every heart. If it is important that the heathen should have Christ preached to them, that those who have never known Christ should learn to put their trust in him, it is highly important also that believers should have a larger portion of the Divine Spirit; and being more strengthened in the Divine life themselves, should be better able to instruct and strengthen others. If the Spirit is not more largely poured out upon us at home, we shall be little able to do much for the heathen abroad. We complain of the want of missionaries; few are willing to go and preach the Gospel to distant nations, and fewer still are well qualified to do so. The only remedy is prayer. Well may others be unwilling to go and preach, if we who stay at home are unwilling to pray. But we have the Divine promise, that, if we pray to the Lord of the harvest, he himself will send forth labourers into the vineyard; and the labourers whom he sends shall certainly not labour in vain.

Of all things, prayer is the most easy and the most difficult. In its own nature, it is most easy. It is but raising up the heart to Him who is not far off from any one of us,—to Him in whom we live, and move and have our being,—who is reconciled

to us by the death of Christ,—who, having given us his beloved Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, hath given us an infinite proof, that with Christ he will freely give us all things. And yet, to our fallen nature, prayer is most difficult. Here we have a strong proof how far human nature is alienated from God. We are carnal. Prayer, though an easy, is a spiritual exercise. It appeals to no visible object, and receives no audible answer. There is nothing in it on which the senses can rest, except the fervency of the animal spirit, which sometimes accompanies it, and which many, unfortunately, consider a principal part of devotion. Prayer is simply taking God at his word,—asking, because he has commanded us to ask, and upon a promise of receiving. It is merely faith expressing its wants in words: Lord, I believe; be it done unto me according as thou hast spoken.

The difficulty we find in prayer can only be overcome by prayer, as the remains of unbelief in the heart are only overcome by perseverance in believing. He that prays frequently, however wandering his prayers may be at first, will certainly, in the end pray fervently and effectually. The free and infinite love of God not only bestows on us grace for grace, but makes each degree of grace a step for ascending to a larger measure. Only to supplications let us add thanksgivings; let us be mindful of the mercies we have already received, as well as of those

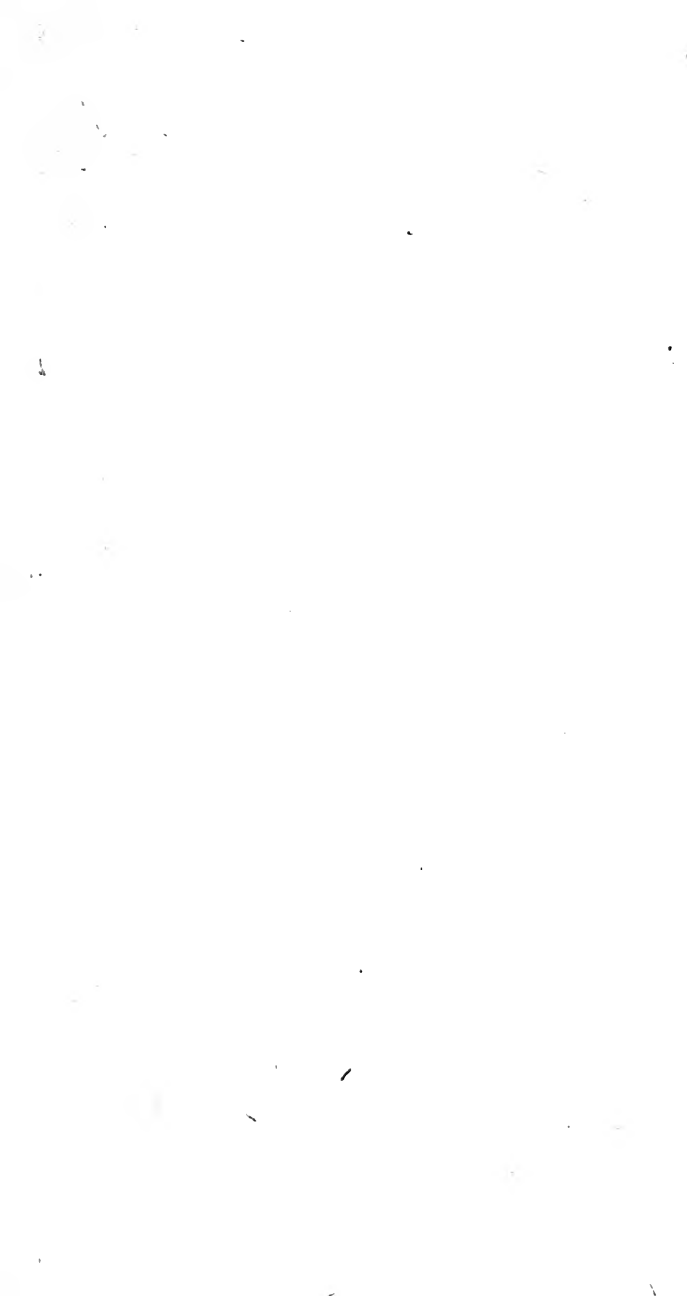
which we still expect from the exceeding riches and goodness of God. The difficulties which we find in prayer from the backwardness of our own hearts, are a fertile source of excuses, when any appointments or meetings for prayer are proposed. Now all these excuses are obviated by insisting that each one is bound to pray in private for a larger effusion of the Holy Spirit both upon himself and upon others. To avoid this duty, no possible plea or excuse can be made, and if all believers heartily and sincerely engaged in private prayer, all difficulties and excuses would speedily vanish. The spirit of prayer would descend in a larger measure upon them; the spirit of adoption would lead them to their heavenly Father, as naturally as children are led to their earthly parents for a supply of their wants; the spirit of love and union would bring Christians together, and urge them to pour out their supplications at a throne of grace, for they would soon become aware of the cumulative force of prayer, and that a larger blessing is promised to the petitions of two or three united in Christ's name, than to their individual prayers when they remain separate from each other. Thus, small societies would be naturally and insensibly formed without any formality or cumbrous preparation, and larger unions, occasionally, when circumstances might render it expedient, would unite their joint supplications, being already united with one heart, by one faith, and one Spirit.

As for the times and seasons of prayer, all must be good. The ear of God is ever open to the cry of those who come unto him, and his Almighty arm is ever ready to bring them certain and effectual help. Whether rising up or lying down, whether at home or in the way, solitary or among the multitudes, we have continual access through the blood of Christ unto the holiest of holies. Not but that particular circumstances and particular seasons are particularly favourable for pouring out the heart before God, and the vicissitudes of human affairs, and the changes of the year, and of the heavenly bodies, which are marking out to us our shortened span of life, and our near approach to a better country, call upon us urgently to intercede for the welfare of others, and for the preservation of our native land, while yet an opportunity is afforded to us.

We have reached the crisis both of our temporal and spiritual welfare. We are at present weighed in the balance of God's justice and mercy. Our praying or our not praying with increasing fervency and earnestness, will, if we may judge from the past history of religion, either way turn the scale. Those who neglect to press forward, will see the Divine influence more and more withdrawn, but those who proceed forward, calling for Divine aid, will go on from strength to strength, and will drink deeper and deeper of the waters of life. We know from the sure word of prophecy, that times of judgment are approaching, that many nations will be scattered like

the chaff of the summer thrashing-floor, and we know that judgment must begin at the house of God. This nation has been more favoured than any other European people: mindful how we have abused our privileges, we have no reason to assume any unwarranted security from God's former goodness. Let us not be high-minded, but fear. Let us hope also, but on scriptural grounds. Let us ask, and we shall receive; let us commit ourselves in faith and prayer to the Divine protection, and we shall be sustained by the everlasting arms, and we shall be carried triumphantly through that day of trial which shall fall as a snare upon the nations of the earth. Let us recollect that if the national vices have been accumulating generation after generation, and are now ready to fill the cup of Divine vengeance to the brim, the prayers of the saints in this country for many ages have been accumulating also. No prayer of faith is ever lost. And in pouring forth our supplications before God, for our religion and our country, we join the last aspirations that were breathed from the death-beds of former saints, and from the fires of the early martyrs, till the whole united cry for deliverance come into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth.





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